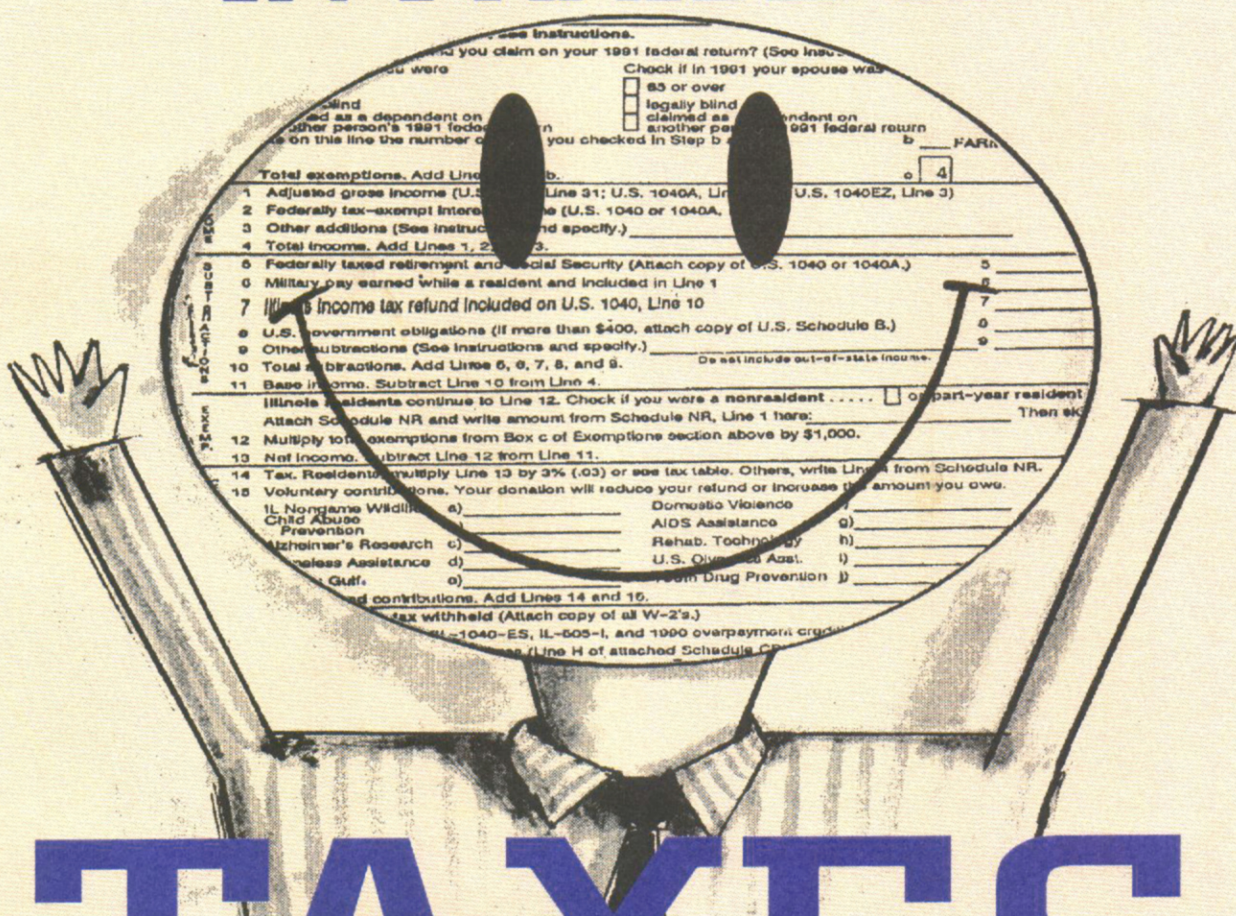


TOP STORY: CARLOS FUENTES, POSTMODERN VENTRILOQUIST
April 18 - May 1, 1994

IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

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An essay by
David Moberg
page 14

EDITORIAL

RACIAL GERRYMANDERING REVIVES OLD REFORM IDEA

Last year, in *Shaw vs. Reno*, the Supreme Court called into question the legality of several congressional districts designed to enhance racial representation. The case at hand concerned a North Carolina district created to encompass an African-American majority. A thin strip 160 miles long, it is one of two new districts that made possible the election of two black representatives in 1992. They were the first African-Americans elected to Congress from a state that is one-quarter black. (See *In These Times*, March 21.)

The practice of drawing district lines to achieve desired majorities is, of course, not new. It goes back to 1811, when Elbridge Gerry, then governor of Massachusetts, redistricted the state to ensure a majority for his party in its congressional delegation. One district, shaped like a salamander, was dubbed a gerrymander. The name and the practice stuck—at least until 1964, when the Supreme Court ruled that gerrymandering for narrowly partisan purposes was unconstitutional.

Still, since the '60s civil rights movement, gerrymandering has continued, though its purpose changed from preventing diversity to enhancing minority representation. Even so, Hispanics and women are still underrepresented in Congress.

No matter how imaginative, redistricting cannot provide equitable representation. And even if it could, the special treatment for minorities would further increase racial and ethnic hostilities. While the impetus behind these special districts is good, the policy creates political ill will and draws public discourse away from more equitable and democratic kinds of election reform.

A year ago, President Clinton withdrew his nomination of Lani Guinier as assistant attorney general for civil rights because she sought a genuine solution to the problem of racial gerrymandering. (See *In These Times*, June 14.) At the time, he said that upon belatedly reading her proposals, he discovered them to be outside the pale of acceptable dis-

course. But now, as the North Carolina case is facing a court review, Guinier's proposal for a form of proportional representation (PR) is gaining respectful attention.

Her idea is not new. It is practiced much more widely around the world than our single-member system. Simply put, Guinier would combine several existing districts into multimember districts and allow cumulative voting. In a district that elects five members, each person would have five votes. These could be cast for five different candidates, or they could all be cast for one, or for any other desired combination.

By concentrating their votes, a minority—of any kind—could be assured that its representation would be roughly proportional to its size. This would make the electoral system much more accessible to political and social, as well as racial, minorities.

It would greatly reduce big money influence in congressional elections. And it would almost certainly reduce resentment about special treatment for selected minorities, while increasing popular participation in the political process.

PR has a long history as a counterbalance to the powers that be in the United States. A Proportional Representation League was organized in the 1890s, and in the teens and '20s five cities, including Cleveland and Sacramento, Calif., adopted the reform, despite the opposition of business interests.

As one business group in Dayton, Ohio, explained in 1914, proportional representation would benefit only "socialists and negroes."

***Talk about
proportional
representation
is gaining a
renewed
legitimacy.***

And he was pretty much correct. In Kalamazoo, Mich., in 1918, a "radical socialist" was elected in that city's PR election. Similarly, in New York City in the '40s, two Communists, one the party's leading black, Benjamin Davis Jr., were elected along with a member of the American Labor Party.

Needless to say, in the Cold War era that began shortly after Davis' election, PR did not fare well. It was repealed in New York, and it has not been adopted in any major city since.

Using PR to solve many of the limits on democracy posed by our current system of electing members to Congress would require a change in federal law (though not the Constitution). Doing so would not be easy, but public discussion of this issue might well strike a chord in the cacophony of discontent that now surrounds our government. ◀

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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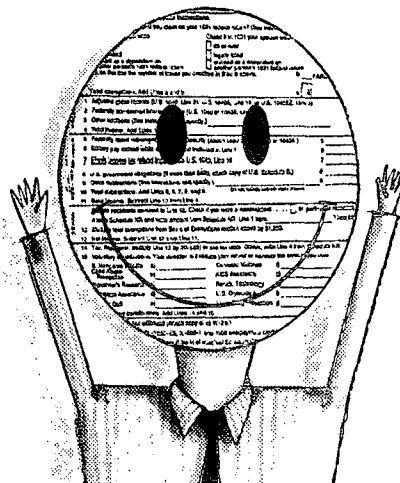


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LETTERS

Uplifting titillation

Thank you for printing "Forced arguments" by Leora Tanenbaum (*ITT*, March 7). It's rare to see such a rational contribution to the debate on the emotionally charged subject of pornography.

But as someone who was referred to in the article, I need to clarify a couple of points. Reference was made to my rigorous counterattacks on those firing salvos at the sexual entertainment industry. It is true that I give no quarter to those "antis" who seek a prohibition on a legitimate form of free expression. However, while defending the industry's legal right to exist, I have first and foremost considered myself a critic and reformer, roles I have filled for 10 years now.

Like Candida Royalle, my orienta-

tion is toward women and couples. I have always sought to portray a respectful image, so that men and women with high self-esteem and mutual respect can enjoy uplifting titillation.

Your readers may be interested to know that I am a third-generation socialist/feminist with a B.S. degree in nursing. I have studied human sexuality for over 20 years and have 12 years experience as an adult entertainer. A Pollyanna I'm not! Remember, sexy doesn't have to mean sexist. We must all think in sex-positive terms. Loving one's body and the sensual pleasure that is nature's gift to us is a prerequisite to increased self-esteem. Together we can smash sex-negativism, and we must!

Nina Hartley

Marina del Rey, Calif.

The new prohibitionists

I share Susie Bright's indignation at Catharine MacKinnon's puritanical sexual politics (*ITT*, March 7). But I am equally disturbed by MacKinnon's intellectual dishonesty. For example, MacKinnon has claimed that unreported sexual abuse increased in countries where pornography has been legalized. But, by definition that is a claim that is virtually unverifiable.

It is to Bright's credit that she has not capitulated to MacKinnon's attempts to divert the debate from libertarian principles to a study of correlations and statistics. Imagine, for example, someone proposing to investigate the correlation between teenage suicide and high school curricula that require reading *Romeo and Juliet*.

Pornography has become to MacKinnon's segment of the women's movement of the '90s what alcohol was to their counterpart of the '20s. Some men got drunk and went home and beat up their wives. The solution? Criminalize alcohol.

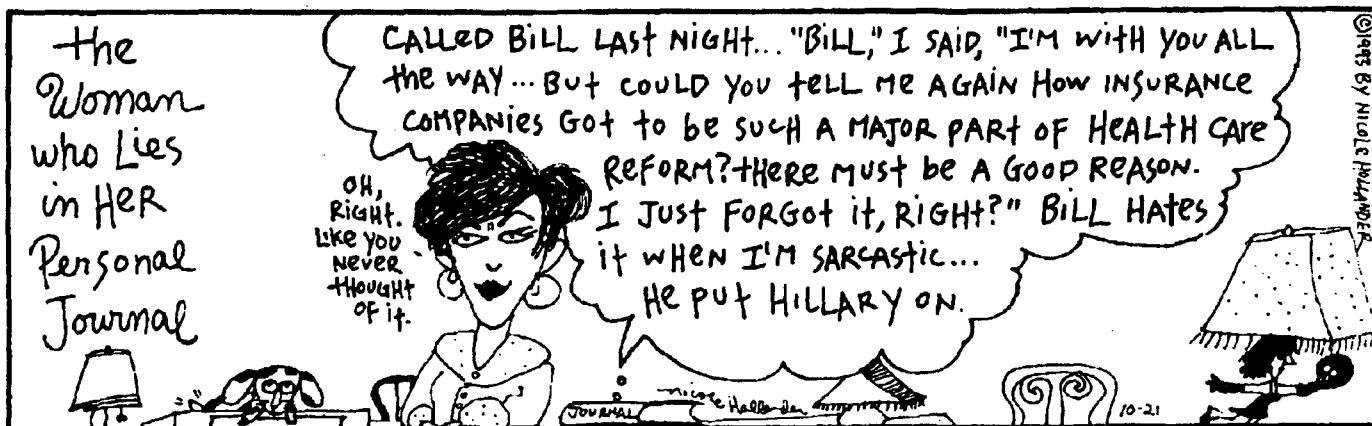
Sol Saporta
Seattle

Pleased

Hats off to *In These Times* for its revolutionary handling of the taboo subject: pornography (*ITT*, March 7).

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



I found the various articles to be amusing, enlightening, intelligent and brave. A few more issues of that caliber and I may become a lifetime sustainer.

Shirley Washington
U.S. Capitol Historical Society
Washington

Insulted

My feminist sensibility has been insulted by *In These Times* recently, and the special issue on pornography (ITT, March 7) was the last straw.

The left media, including *In These Times*, has been brutal in attacking Dworkin, MacKinnon and anti-pornography feminists. David Futrelle misstates MacKinnon's analysis of sexual violence by saying that she believes that most heterosexual intercourse is forced. MacKinnon has never said this at all. He also attacks women who are anti-pornography as being sexually repressed. In other words, any woman who rejects the male-dominated media's image of female beauty and sexuality in favor of a more egalitarian and non-violent sexuality is anti-sex and sexually repressed.

ITT, including an article by Leanne Katz, states that the writer is the executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC). But ITT does not mention that NCAC is partially funded by *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines. Katz complains of intimidating tactics used against NCAC, such as accusations of "being controlled by pornographers." If the shoe fits. ... Katz also seems to equate pornography with "freely available sexual information and open talk about sexual possibilities and experiences." If pornography is sex education, no wonder there is so much violence and disease and so many unwanted pregnancies.

Susie Bright presents disinformation about the results of the Canadian court's *Butler* decision, describing the confiscation of material by Canadian customs as if this is a result of *Butler*. Canadian customs has a long history of using discriminatory practices against

gay and lesbian bookstores from well before *Butler*. MacKinnon states, "In legal fact, it was easier to use Canada's obscenity law oppressively ... before *Butler* than after it. Under *Butler*, it is illegal for customs to seize materials because they are gay or lesbian. Under prior Canadian law, it was legal."

In analyzing any other capitalist industry, ITT would not let apologists for that industry write the articles, but when it comes to the pornography industry, ITT fails to see through the smokescreen. The pornography industry is threatened, and it is using everything within its power to discredit the anti-pornography feminists. Just like other capitalists, pornographers have been able to manipulate the media and silence the opposition. It's quite unfortunate that the left media, including ITT, has also been duped.

Amy Donohue
Fallston, Md.

Editor's note: NCAC, a widely respected organization whose members include Erica Jong, Betty Friedan and Judy Blume, does not receive money from Penthouse; a Playboy Foundation grant makes up less than 1.2 percent of the group's budget.

David Futrelle replies: Amy Donohue has not read MacKinnon very carefully. In her writings, MacKinnon quite deliberately obscures the distinctions between "normal sex" and rape. "Compare victims' reports of rape with women's reports of sex," MacKinnon writes in Toward a Feminist Theory of the State. "They look a lot alike."

Leanne Katz replies: Donohue's "feminist sensibility" tells her that women must have protection from sexually explicit expression. She believes this so passionately that she thinks any opposition to her ideas—particularly from women—must stem from evil motives. And so it seems inconceivable that many feminists oppose censorship precisely because they know from long and sad experience how censorship hurts women's interests.

Canada is showing us how state

censorship, newly legitimated by the Butler decision, actually works. Today, customs bureaucrats, vice cops and courts are acting against expression they consider "degrading" or "dehumanizing." Susie Bright, Pat Califia and Andrea Dworkin are among the women writers whose works have been challenged by customs since Butler. As Canadian sociologist Thelma McCormack has said, "The Butler decision belongs to the right. The Supreme Court of Canada doesn't give a damn about gender equality. It is concerned with control and was pleased to have a feminist gloss put on it."

Judis compromises himself

John Judis (ITT, March 21) admits that he endorsed the Clinton health care reform proposal without really understanding it. He made up his mind on the basis of a single seminar offered by two of the plan's neo-liberal policy wonk originators.

He still doesn't fully understand how the Clinton plan works. But now that he has taken the trouble to try to learn something about it, he likes it less. Even so, he wants us all to support it because the single-payer proposal has no chance of passing.

Why give two full pages of your short magazine for discussion of one of the most pressing issues of the day by a man who avowedly doesn't know what he's talking about? Judis repeatedly asserts that the administration plan is funded by payroll taxes, suggesting as an "obvious alternative" Social Security taxes. The Social Security tax is a payroll tax, but the financing for the administration health care plan is not. Clinton's "employer mandate" is better called a job tax. The difference is that a payroll tax like the Social Security tax is a percentage of earnings, while the employer mandate costs the same for a \$500,000 a year executive as for a \$25,000 a year clerk.

There are categorical subsidies in the Clinton plan for very low-paying

jobs and very small businesses, but the fundamental regressivity remains. There isn't enough money in the plan to make coverage affordable for low-income people and it threatens to put many of them out of work, while high co-payments will keep them from getting needed services.

Judis' most egregious sin is his political judgment. He says that since the Clinton plan is being attacked from the right, and since "compromise" threatens to give us something even worse, our job is to defend the Clinton plan. This proves how wrong Judis was in the first place. If the broad left-liberal community had presented a united front for the single-payer plan, then the "compromise" we were talking about now might be more acceptable. The time to compromise is at the end of a struggle, not the beginning. By selling out before the fight was joined, Judis and his ilk made a bad outcome a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But all is not lost. Neither "managed competition" nor the even more regressive "compromise" can ameliorate the problems that have made health care a crisis in this country. This struggle will not be over in this Congress. In the end, the U.S. must have single-payer national health care. Our job as principled progressives is to say what we believe and fight for it, now and always. The longer and louder we say what is true, the sooner we will win what is right.

Bart Laws
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Pretending?

Is John B. Judis (*ITT*, March 21) really that stupid, or is he just pretending? He seems to think that a single-payer health plan consists of higher taxes, period. He is unaware of the trade-off in which the average person would get back \$10 worth of health care for every dollar of increased taxes, a deal that would make a Wall Streeter drool. For a person with high

medical expenses, the advantage could be 100 to one, or better. All this because we would have one government bureaucracy instead of 1,500 insurance company bureaucracies.

The Congressional Budget Office has calculated that the huge administrative savings and the cap on rising costs under the American Health Security Act (HR 1200) would save the taxpayers \$292 billion between 1996 and 2003, making it the most cost-effective health plan before Congress. It would also provide universal health care coverage.

Eugene Kusmiak
Fallbrook, Calif.

No surrender

I agree with John B. Judis (*ITT*, March 21)—the public is strongly against new taxes and big government programs. But why? If liberals and progressives properly consider that question, it's the single-payer health care plan that must be supported and not the Clinton plan, as Judis argues.

Americans feel they pay too much for what they get. They think government programs are too inefficient and bureaucratic, and they complain that the programs don't work for them. Given this, I'm amazed Judis still supports the plan which will cost most people more for less, create an additional expensive, inefficient bureaucracy, may well take away people's choice of doctors and will reduce the quality of their care. How will this help?

Yes, the conventional wisdom in Washington is that the single-payer plan cannot pass Congress. But just because its political support is low does not mean it doesn't have wide public support. Although the single-payer plan does call for an increase in taxes, average people generally support it because they see that, when the useless insurance agencies are eliminated, they'll get more of what they pay for.

Although Republicans and conservative Democrats can block us at this time, let's keep the pressure on by fighting for real reform and not for a

half-baked compromise that will make everything worse.

Dean Mattson
El Paso, Texas

Making single-payer work

It's nice to see that John Judis (*ITT*, March 21) has altered some of his conclusions regarding the health care reform issue and now thinks that a Canadian-style system is the best choice, although he clings to the notion that Congress would never pass such a reform. He further concludes that progressives and liberals should rally around the Clinton plan, for that is the best that we will be able to get.

There was a time when I would have agreed, but not since I did some basic research and joined in the campaign to put the California Health Security Act on the ballot. It would establish a Canadian-style system, funded by a small payroll tax and other public medical funds from a variety of sources. Such a system would eliminate the 1,500 insurance companies that generate millions of miles of red tape and hundreds of thousands of forms and never perform any medical service of any kind but manage to get away with 25 percent of the health care dollar, or \$250 billion a year.

My experience in the field collecting signatures is revealing of the realities of the political arena. We need 1.1 million signatures to get it on the ballot. It appears that the small band of overworked and underfunded volunteers are doing the impossible and getting that total. Why? Because the case for single-payer system is overwhelming, and the California voters are making that judgment by the thousands. Politicians will ignore this at their peril. I predict that the California Health Security Act will qualify for the ballot and, after a political Armageddon in which the insurance companies will use every possible tactic, it will pass. The politicians who fail to listen to the

voice of the people better start gearing up for an alternative career. Since they are so comfortable with insurance companies, perhaps they can go to work directly for them.

David A. Williams
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Pragmatism

"Sometimes, sticking to principles is best" was a thoughtful editorial (ITT, March 7) about the controversy over health care. However, I do not agree with your basic assumption that it is because "labor and liberal pragmatists jumped into Clinton's hip pocket before the fight began" that the single-payer approach will not be given a fair hearing.

For 25 years the American Rifle Association has blocked gun legislation by the tried and proven method of buying the votes of our congressional representatives. On the issue of single-payer health care, the opponent is a \$300 billion insurance industry. No amount of bullying from the pulpit by a reform president can obscure this.

The administration and its supporters are not aware of the shortcomings of managed competition. For this very reason, there is an option in the president's Health Care Security Act for the states to opt for a single-payer approach, with provisions such that if these plans prove successful they can eventually be adopted by the federal government.

The insurance industry will fight down to the last dollar of their enormous slush fund. Congress will at very best postpone single-payer proposals. Such a brawl would hobble the administration. The president's managed health care proposal is building momentum and the window of opportunity is this year! This approach is sound and deserves the support of *In These Times*.

Hal Kleinman
Chair, Democrats Abroad
Munich

The man who wouldn't be king

Marvin Gluck's letter (ITT, March 21) and fable gave a good new slant on George Washington but was incomplete. This very rich man turned down the chance to become king of America. Barry Stavis has written a whole play on this subject.

And Washington's second favor to this country was his refusal to serve more than two terms. Patrician slave owner he was, but Gluck's is an incomplete description.

Pete Seeger
Beacon, N.Y.

Clarifications:

Ecologist Laura Westra ("In Person," Feb. 21), whose culinary habits

caused a furor on the April 4 letters pages, reports that she does not, in fact, eat red meat and has not done so for 30 years. Westra, however, does eat fish and free-range fowl.

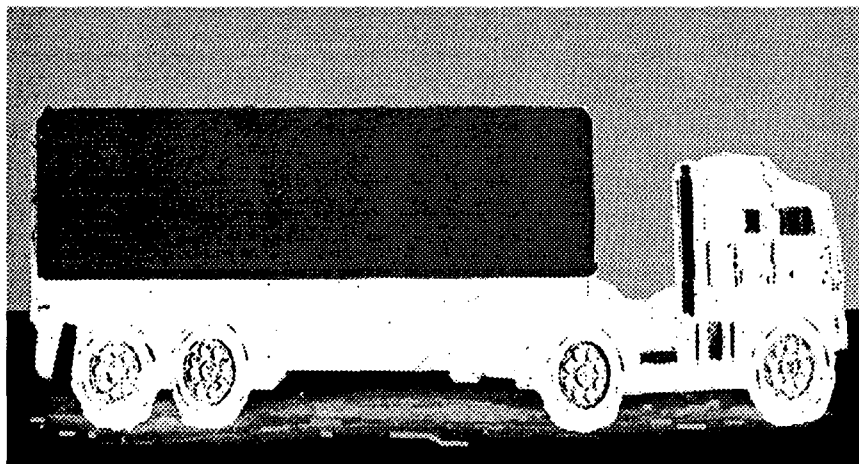
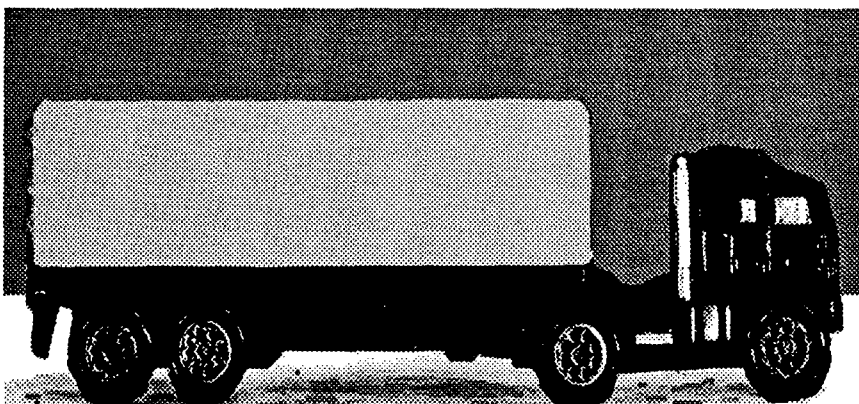
In "Shameful Pleasures" (ITT, March 7), sociologist Diana Russell was quoted as saying that "pornography clearly does not cause rape, as it seems safe to assume that some unknown percentage of pornography consumers do not rape women, and that many rapes are unrelated to pornography." Dr. Russell intended this statement to apply only if one were to define causation narrowly, as when "an event (or events) ... precedes and results in the occurrence of another event." Russell *does* in fact believe that pornography causes rape, and that, in fact, "the evidence that pornography causes rape is stronger than the evidence that smoking causes lung cancer."

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



InSHORT



THE GREAT FREIGHT FIGHT

The legacy of deregulation, non-union competition and past union concessions weighed heavily on the 75,000 Teamster members who went on strike at the nation's major freight haulers on April 6. At one time, the union's National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA)—covering companies that specialize in shipments that are large but less than truckload-size—was the Teamsters' crowning achievement. In 1980 the NMFA covered 270,000 workers; now, after deregulation, a concession-riddled contract cov-



By Woody Igou

Poll taxing

The Republican Party has been stunned by the responses to some of the 800,000 surveys mailed out to party activists. A



spokesperson admitted surprise, especially on the answers to questions about abortion,

where 43 percent of the supposed "hard-core" Republicans said they favored abortion rights. An analysis of the survey in the party publication *Rising Tide* omitted the figures on abortion.

All this unity and Oliver North, too.

Greedy gains

Leslie Abramson, lawyer for accused parent-murderer Erik Menendez, has demanded additional fees from the taxpayers to continue to represent



her client after a hung jury. Although she received more than \$900,000 for the six-

month trial, she told a judge, "I cannot afford to go bankrupt." After the court ruled she had to defend her client until the end of the case, she noted, "My situation is called a serf." She has now sent out a fund-raising letter to 3,000 people who wrote sympathetically to Erik in

prison—asking them to send her additional funds for his defense.

A true solicitor.

Id on a blade

In a further chipping away of the porcelain grace of figure skating, French skater Surya



Bonaly threw a fit at the world championships in Chiba, Japan. After losing the gold medal to

Yuka Sato, she refused to stand on the podium and then removed the silver medal from around her neck during the Japanese anthem. She stated "the marks are unfair." *Skating's triple Axel Rose.*

Success = hunger

China's economic boom may have a catastrophic effect on the country's ability to feed itself, according to the *New York Times*. Scientists have noted a reduction in the amount of arable land, due to rampant paving for freeways, factories and shopping centers. Ominously, one scholar noted that a 10 percent reduction in China's rice harvest in 1990



could not have been covered by the amount of surplus rice on the international market that

year. Increased topsoil erosion and continued population growth will increase the risk of famine in the future.

Welcome to the Malthus Mall, the world's largest...

APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Vapid Cultural Zephyrs
2. E Channel Stupid
3. Unauthorized Biography Zone
4. Republican Convention Rerun
5. Bob Dole Spleenic
6. Mega-Dittos from Hell
7. NRA Heart and Brains
8. Pyongyang on my mind
9. Disavowed by Bosnian Serbs
10. Hurry, Melt the Polar Cap!

ers only about 120,000 workers (though another 40,000 union drivers and dockworkers are under lesser contracts).

With deregulation of the trucking industry came intense competition, numerous bankruptcies and consolidation of control, especially under the Big Three—Yellow Freight, Consolidated Freightways and Roadway. Non-union carriers also won about 30 percent of the market, but non-union subsidiaries of the big unionized companies control one-third of that segment. The freight companies are also under pressure from the United Parcel Service (UPS), whose separate Teamster contract was renegotiated last year. UPS took advantage of concessions under former Teamster president Jackie Presser to expand its use of low-paid part-time workers, who now make up half of its workforce. It is now nibbling at the lower ranges of the freight company business.

To keep pace with their non-union competitors, the freight companies—bargaining as Trucking Management, Inc. (TMI)—want to greatly expand the use of rail, or intermodal, shipping, which is now restricted under the contract. They also want the right to hire part-time workers at starting wages of \$9 an hour, compared to the \$17-an-hour average of workers under contract. Under the current contract, the companies can call in casual workers one day at a time, but cannot bring in very low-wage part-timers for just a few hours, as they would like. TMI also wants to hire new full-time workers at reduced pay.

In calling the strike, Teamster president Ron Carey emphasized the union's opposition to part-time workers and to the companies' demand to prohibit strikes over unresolved grievances. The union has insisted that it will consider any company proposal for greater flexibility, including use of rail, but "if it doesn't contain real job security provisions, it won't go anywhere," spokesman Bernie Mulligan said. Such provisions could include restrictions on non-union subsidiaries, numerical guarantees of full-time jobs or other measures.

As *In These Times* went to press, the strike reportedly had solid rank-and-file support, despite the union's recent internal battles. (See *In These Times*, April 4.) Carey also arranged \$80 million in credit with other unions, because the Teamster strike fund is nearly depleted and because members recently rejected a dues hike to replenish it. TMI suffered a major defection by the fifth-largest carrier, Carolina Freight, just before the strike deadline.

While freight industry workers have lost about one-fifth of their buying power over the past 17 years, deregulation has also squeezed the companies, who engage in destructive price wars and undercut their primary operations with their own non-union operations. Their return on investment has declined consistently, and they have not been able to invest in newer, more efficient, less polluting trucks, according to Cornell University researcher Michael Belzer. This has not stopped them from greatly boosting top executive pay, however. With the recent pick-up in the economy, they are temporarily in a stronger position.

Carey argues that the union is fighting to preserve decent-paying jobs not only for current members but for the next generation. He asserts that the economy benefits from such workers protecting their buying power. The companies want to cut wages, benefits and working conditions in the name of flexibility; the union insists that decent-paying jobs be preserved as the industry adapts to competitive pressures. "The issue is," Belzer argued, "what kind of flexibility and on what terms can be mutually satisfactory?"

—David Moberg

THE ITALIAN PEROT

After two years of dramatic corruption scandals that have led to the most serious political crisis faced by any Western European government in the last 20 years, Italy's political vacuum has been filled by an ascendant right headed by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. In the watershed March election, Berlusconi's right-wing Alliance for Freedom—comprised of the federalist Northern League headed by Umberto Bossi, Berlusconi's Forza Italia and Gianfranco Fini's neo-fascist National Alliance—secured an absolute majority in Italy's lower house of parliament and a qualified majority in the upper house.

As recently as two months ago, the Progressive Alliance, headed by Achille Occhetto's Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), seemed destined to assume power, having fared well in local elections late last year. At that point Berlusconi—who has been described as a cross between Ross Perot and Rupert Murdoch—entered the fray, embarking on what he described as a “freedom crusade” designed to stave off the challenge from the left. Berlusconi, who owns the highly successful AC Milan soccer team, named his new political party Forza Italia (Let's Go, Italy!), after a popular soccer slogan.

Many suspected that the suddenly civic-minded Berlusconi was driven by less than noble motives—namely a desire to protect his television monopoly, which controls 80 percent of the country's commercial TV and would likely have been broken up had the PDS triumphed. Often addressed as “Sua Emittenza” (His Broadcastship), Berlusconi is one of the wealthiest men in Italy, controlling a vast commercial empire that includes Italy's largest advertising agency, the Mondadori publishing house, two large supermarket chains, an insurance company and a financial services firm.

The campaign was a colossal media spectacle. Berlusconi's private stations—which serve up a tawdry array of talk shows, soap operas and game shows—shamelessly plugged his Forza Italia. And Berlusconi received an endorsement of sorts from Ambra Angiolini, the star of his latest hit show, *Non e la RAI*, a variety program featuring scantily clad 13-year-old dancing girls. Angiolini, the most popular of the young dancers, proclaimed on the air that “God is for Berlusconi and Satan is for [PDS leader] Occhetto.”

Ultimately, Berlusconi triumphed because he told the voters what they wanted to hear: he promised lower taxes and a million new jobs. Throughout the campaign, he sought to present himself as the representative of a new Italy, as a newcomer to politics untainted by the corruption of the past. But in fact he is very much a product of the old order. His close connections with former Socialist leader Bettino Craxi—now irretrievably disgraced by a vast range of corruption charges—were well known. In addition, he has admitted to being a member of the notorious P2 Masonic Lodge, a shadowy “state within a state” long held to be behind a number of right-wing terrorist bombings in the '70s and early '80s.

Despite the talk of a “new Italy,” a surprising number of candidates for parliament were in effect *riciclati* (recycled), minor league career politicians who, while never having served in parliament, were nevertheless very much a part of the system they claimed to be seeking to reform. A report prepared by the research group Censis pointed out that close to 60 percent of the candidates had already sat in regional, provincial or town councils.

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Censorship, yes

Television is too violent and too sexy, and the solution is censorship. That is the conclusion of a majority of respondents to a recent poll by the Times Mirror Center for People and the Press. Fifty-two percent of Americans support anti-violence censorship; 59 percent support sexual censorship. A clear majority, 62 percent, think there is too much violence on television, and 63 percent think TV news programs invade privacy. One thing there doesn't seem to be enough of on American TV: current events. Compared to their counterparts in Europe and the Americas, U.S. respondents were abysmally ignorant of such basics as the identity of Boris Yeltsin. Only 46 percent of the U.S. respondents knew who the Russian president is, compared to 67 percent in Mexico and 93 percent in Germany.

Censorship, no

If you think the pro-censorship tilt of the Times Mirror poll was just an artifact of statistics, take a look at *People for the American Way's* hefty opus, *Artistic Freedom under Attack, II*. The book tracks 204 attacks on artistic expression in 1992-1993, alphabetically, from Birmingham, Ala. (where there was outrage over a university's purchased photograph of an Andres Serrano photograph) to Oshkosh, Wis. (where parents and students became incensed at the use of a Michelangelo fresco featuring male nudity on a high school yearbook cover). The would-be censors carried the day an astonishing two-thirds of the

time. Does it matter? At Morehouse College in Atlanta, after students protested a campus presentation of gay issues, the college dropped all gay and lesbian programming, including a black gay male performance group. People for the American Way can be reached at (202) 467-4999.

Undead at the USIA
It's official. TV Martí "achieves virtually no reception nor impact within the greater Havana area due to heavy jamming," according to a United States Information Agency (USIA) report. The anti-Castro propaganda service, started under Reagan, has almost never been received by Cuban TV sets, but because of Cuban-American support the project has never been abolished. And it won't now, if the report's suggestions are followed. It recommends technical fixes to circumvent jamming, failing to address the arguments of both broadcasters—who hate to risk Cuban jamming of their signals in retaliation—and liberal and left critics, who argue that the propaganda station is a violation of international agreements on use of the airwaves.

And...

The third in a series of training video for abortion rights activists is now available. Cinema Guild (1697 Broadway, #506, New York, NY 10019, 1-800-723-5522) is distributing Stand Up for Choice's 15-minute *From Vigilance to Violence: Voices from the Anti-Abortion Front*.

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Though relatively untainted by the corruption scandals, the PDS—the successor to the Italian Communist Party—was nevertheless the biggest loser in the elections. In an attempt to court the center, the PDS sought to distance itself from the more traditional left strategies of its main coalition partner, Communist Refoundation, which called for higher taxes and Italy's withdrawal from NATO.

Berlusconi now must face up to a daunting set of problems, the most immediate of which is to form a government out of his unlikely, and combustible, coalition. The electoral pact that was signed between the three right-wing parties was strictly an electoral marriage of convenience.

The Northern League—a recently formed group that emerged out of a number of regional "autonomist" leagues in the North—has talked at times of outright secession. The League taps into the frustrations of northerners who see themselves as hard-working victims of a system that allows their taxes to be squandered in ill-monitored transfers to a corrupt and lazy South. Bossi, the controversial leader of the League, has so far been reluctant to enter the new government; during the campaign he repeatedly attacked his coalition partners, dismissing Berlusconi as a "detergent salesman" and Fini of the National Alliance as a "reactionary fascist."

For his part, Fini favors a strong centralized state and a continuation of the old system of patronage and massive state aid to the South. He prefers to be described as a "post-fascist," though in an interview with *La Stampa* four days after the election he referred to Benito Mussolini as the "greatest statesman of the 20th century." Equally disconcerting is the talk among Alliance members of the need to annex Italian-speaking sections of the former Yugoslavia.

When and if a government is formed, Berlusconi (who will likely become prime minister) will certainly find the art of politics more difficult than the artifice of campaigning.

—George Hodak

ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid

There's nothing new under the son.



I N P E R S O N



© TORY READ

UNSTOPPABLE

*Despite losing a leg to a
Somalian landmine, Ken
Rutherford forges ahead*

International Rescue Mission, a private volunteer organization, helping to found credit unions to enable destitute people get back on their feet. Ironically, due to a landmine blast last December 16, Ken Rutherford will never walk on two feet again.

His left leg had to be amputated; doctors are fighting to save his right. "One doctor said it was the worst foot he has ever seen that was saveable," says Rutherford.

He tells his story with candor, recounting the moment of tragedy easily, selflessly, unaware of the high drama. In the small town of Lugh, he and some colleagues had piled into a Land Rover to visit a small manufacturing facility that needed a loan. En route, the truck hit a mine. Upon impact, he didn't hear a giant boom nor did he feel the pain of his leg being ripped from his body. He only saw a cloud of dust. Seconds later, he understood what had happened. "I looked down and could see the bone sticking out of my leg. I couldn't make either of my legs work, so I grabbed the steering wheel to pull myself up. I dragged myself to my radio and called for help. I called 'This is Kilo Romeo,' my call name, 'Hit landmine, am bleeding, I'm O positive, send airplane.'"

Ken Rutherford has dedicated his life to help ease human suffering in the developing world; in the process, he has lost a limb. The 31-year-old relief worker spent four months in Somalia last fall with the

ETC.

By Miles Harvey

A healthy tax

Imagine this: a member of Congress proposes to raise a tax by more than 800 percent—and two out of every three Americans support the increase. Now imagine that this same tax increase saves an estimated 1.7 million American lives.

Preposterous? Not at all, say supporters of Rep. Pete Stark's (D-CA) recent proposal to raise the federal excise tax on cigarettes from 24 cents to \$2 per pack. According to a survey sponsored by the American Cancer Society, 66 percent of all Americans would favor such legislation. And the Joint Tax Committee of Congress estimates that Stark's plan—which includes provisions for helping tobacco farmers adjust to the expected decline in demand for their product—would raise \$60 billion in new federal revenue in the first three years.

How could such revenues be used? Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN), sponsors of a Canadian-style health care plan, also support a \$2 per pack cigarette tax. They say it could help pay for their single-payer proposal. But just because the tax makes sense doesn't mean it will become law. The tobacco industry has lots of money invested in congressional campaigns.

For its part, the industry rightly claims that the proposed tax would be regressive: on a percentage basis, it would take a bigger chunk out of poor smokers' incomes than rich smokers' incomes. But when did the tobacco industry start caring about poor people? A disproportionate share of the

industry's \$4 billion annual advertising and promotion budget is targeted at women, children and minorities. That propaganda has been financed, in part, by hikes in the cost of cigarettes that have averaged more than 10 percent a year for more than a decade. Needless to say, those price increases also hit poor people harder than rich people.

Forgotten news

Project Censored, the media watchdog group, has released its annual report on the 25 most underreported stories in the United States. Heading this year's list of "news that didn't make the news" was a little-noticed U.N. report showing that the poverty rate for U.S. children was double that of any other industrialized country. As usual, an *In These Times* report also made the list. Aushra Abouzeid's July 26, 1993, look at the chemical dangers posed by carpets in the home was the No. 21 most underreported story of 1993, according to Project Censored. The 18-year-old group is headed by Sonoma State University professor Carl Jensen. Copies of the 1993 yearbook are available for \$14.95 from Four Walls Eight Windows press, 39 West 14th St. New York, NY 10011.

Still green

Readers worried that *In These Times'* new thicker, whiter paper stock is environmentally unfriendly can rest easy. Instead of putting old copies of the magazine in the "newsprint" recycling bin, you can simply place them in the "office paper" bin. Or better yet, hang on to them.

As others applied tourniquets, Rutherford fought to stay conscious. He credits that feat with saving his life. But, he says, he was not afraid to die, and recalls being surprisingly lucid, assessing his short, productive career on this earth. "I thought almost with a smile, it's been a great life. I have the best job. I didn't think I was going to die. I thought, oh well, it's going to be harder with just one leg. But then, when the bleeding started and I started spitting up blood, I got a little worried. I thought, oh no, I may not get a chance to get married to my fiancée and have a family and kids. What a terrible shame. So I knew I would have to pace myself for the next 48 hours until I could get first-class medical care."

Rutherford recently left a Denver hospital, his fifth hospital in four countries. He has bought a house and plans to get married in September. His most immediate goal is to walk down the aisle unassisted. Initially, he wanted to return to the field and continue with relief work. His family and fiancée have now persuaded him that his energy and enthusiasm might be best used in teaching.

He applauds the U.S. troop withdrawal that took place at the end of March, asserting that, despite clan violence, Somalis will be able to rebuild their country. "I think the Americans did a great job in bringing peace. They were very well liked. But when they started to chase [Gen. Mohamed Farah] Aidid, they compromised their neutrality. They became just another clan. It is good that they are leaving."

When he undertook the Somalia assignment, Rutherford says he understood the risks, but he felt confident, even exhilarated. After all, he had earned a master's degree at Georgetown University studying ethnic conflict, and had already worked in Senegal for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and in Mauritania for the Peace Corps. "This was my dream job," he claims. "What could be better than helping people who have lost everything, their homes, their jobs, their families. What could be better than giving them money and hope. The job was fantastic."

In fact, Rutherford's work was critical to the recovery of Somalia. With funding from both the United States and United Nations, Rutherford tried to finance labor-intensive enterprises from poultry projects to donkey carts to electricity generation. Jobs created by these projects would encourage Somalis to return home from the refugee camps in Kenya and elsewhere to resume the business of life. When Rutherford had his accident, more than 400 applications for credit sat on his desk.

The landmine was not his first brush with death. Working in an area known to be a stronghold of militant Islamic fundamentalists, he says that, as a white Christian American he knew his life was in jeopardy every day. "Every time I rejected a loan I got a death threat. And I tried to charge very little or no interest," he says, explaining that it is against the law of the Koran to charge interest. "I was very sensitive to their Islamic ways. I worked closely with the clan elders. I had the elders reject applications because it was a lot better for the elders to do it than a white Christian American." But, he recalls, "as those black Islamic fundamentalists sped me off to the city to get medical aid. I thought, now this is ironic. Here I am a white American Christian whom they supposedly hate. I have my head on the lap of a black African Muslim who is holding a machine gun in one hand and is squeezing my hand with the other. And he is saving my life. Isn't that great?"

—April Oliver

G O V E R N M E N T

In praise of taxes

A

Politicians' fear of the T-word is endangering our social stability and economic future.

By David Moberg

At this time of year it's risky to say a kind word about taxes. Who really loves to pay them? Who doesn't think about legal ways to keep them low? But in the face of anti-tax hysteria, let's muster two modest cheers for taxes as an imperfect indicator of how civilized we are.

There's nothing virtuous in taxes themselves, of course. They are simply the price of government. Opposition to what government does—from militarism to coddling welfare cheats—generates tax protests from the left and the right. Taxes inevitably become symbolic targets for inchoate anger about a complex of frustrations with both government and society.

Yet much contemporary anti-tax mentality extends to a distrust of government itself. It assumes that government inevitably interferes with the rational

workings of the market and that taxes deprive people of liberty and happiness by taking money they could otherwise spend as they pleased.

For all their grumbling, most people are not so ideologically anti-tax. One 1991 survey indicated that 60 percent of Americans were satisfied with the federal taxes they paid. But some taxes are better liked than others. A long-running poll commissioned by the federal Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations indicated that for most of the past 15 years people have considered the federal income tax the least fair tax. The poll also showed that Americans think state and local governments are more likely to use their money wisely than the federal government. Yet this was not always the case. During the '70s, local property taxes were the most unpopular kind, and the federal government was seen as giving taxpayers most value for their money.

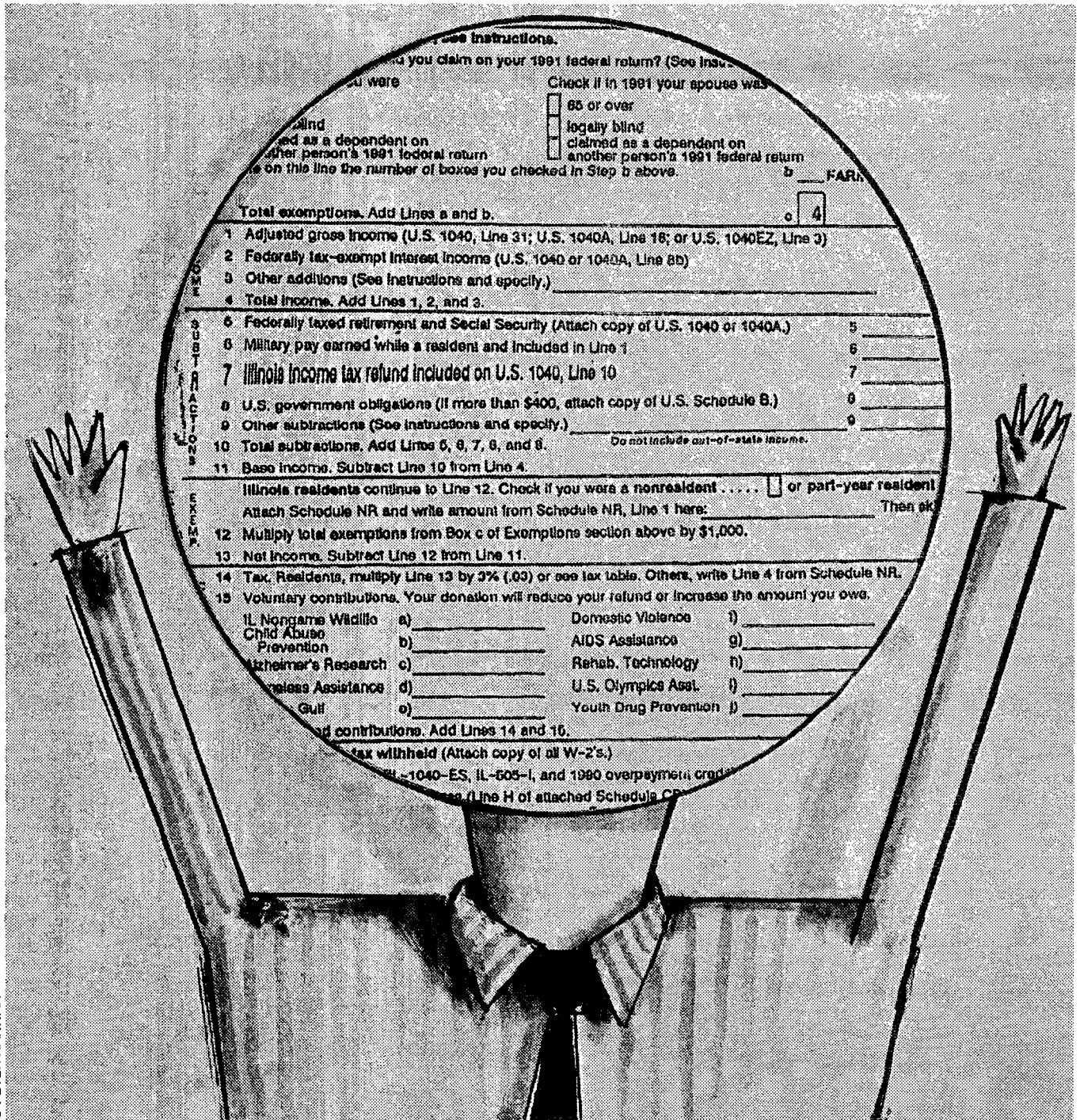
This survey indicates that upper-middle-class people like local taxes and government best, possibly because they are more likely to

live in suburbs, where they see taxes as a direct payment for services that they use, such as schools or parks. But they're less happy with federal taxes, which they see as redistributing their income to poor people.

To the extent that people think they're buying a service they can use, they're more willing to pay taxes. Thus even when taxes in general are unpopular, voters often approve highway construction taxes. Around the world, it's government's job to provide basic economic infrastructure—from education to telecommunications, from transportation to water and sewers. But compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has lagged behind on physical and social infrastructure spending in recent decades. This inadequacy has weakened the U.S. economy.

Oftentimes government is more efficient than private enterprise in providing infrastructure; it is almost always more inclusive. The same holds true for social services, from pensions to medical care. It is clear, for example, that the United States could more easily, fairly and efficiently provide universal health care if it simply adopted a government insurance program funded by some relatively progressive taxes. Americans support taxes for Social Security and Medicare—and citizens of other countries, like Canada, embrace higher taxes for health care, because these programs deliver the goods relatively fairly to everyone. Yet anti-tax hysteria—and the Clinton administration's fear of confronting it rationally—may doom our best chance in many decades for a universal health care system.

Clinton's tax phobia also hinders his ability to deliver on his politically popular pledge of "ending welfare as we know it." Effective welfare reform on the scale Clinton envi-



sions would require large federal expenditures for job training, child care and new employment programs. If Clinton were honest, he would tell the American people: "Look, we can greatly scale back welfare payments, reduce crime and social problems, and make the country more productive, but there's a cost. It's worth paying." Instead, the administration is considering cutting benefits to poor people—especially those who are not citizens—and tinkering with marginal, if justifiable, taxes on gambling proceeds.

Likewise, state and local governments have increasingly

resorted to regressive subterfuges, like lotteries and taxes on casino gambling, as alternatives to straightforward taxation. Battered by interstate competition for jobs, often burdened with costs that the federal government has shifted down the governmental hierarchy, state and local officials have cut necessary spending and erected inequitable tax systems that have engendered revolt.

But there are some signs that voters are ready for honesty. In the March Illinois Democratic primary, for example, the underdog gubernatorial candidate, State Comptroller

Dawn Clark Netsch, won the nomination after pledging support for higher, more progressive state income taxes to fund education—both to fund education and to reduce much-hated property taxes. She has a fair chance of defeating the incumbent Republican, Gov. Jim Edgar, by campaigning as a “straight shooter” who advocates tax fairness and adequate funding for a service—education—that voters support.

But taxes are more than—and different from—purchases of services. First, unlike individual shopping decisions, they’re universal and compulsory, although the government relies on the voluntary compliance of taxpayers. Although democratic government in theory gives voters a voice in how their money is spent, citizens rightly doubt how clearly their voices are heard. In any case, taxes grate on an American temperament that sanctifies individual freedom. Taxes also run counter to the consumer mentality in which self-fulfillment is achieved through one’s choice of things to buy. Since government can be tyrannical as well as ennobling, skepticism about the power of the state is reasonable: utopians of the left and libertarian right have dreamt of the withering of the state and the emergence of self-governing societies.

However, that inescapable universality is also one of the greatest virtues of taxes. It reinforces the message that, like it or not, we are part of a community from which we cannot escape. In a society that clearly is far from utopian, we need a mechanism to enforce some, however imperfect, notion of a common good. Taxes thus clash directly with the kind of privatized sentiments epitomized in California suburban real estate developments with their walls, locked gates and private security forces. Sadly, universal taxes don’t in themselves create community consciousness.

Attempts to forge a sense of common social purpose—or simply a sense that we’re all in the same boat—have been a losing proposition in recent decades. White resentment over measures to redress racism and to make blacks part of the American community has made it harder to use government and taxes to create and enforce a feeling that we all share a common fate, as political journalists E.J. Dionne and Thomas B. Edsall have argued.

The working of the market as a fragmenting force, dissolving old social bonds, has played an important role in this breakdown. The relatively less restrained free market forces of the ’80s, reinforced by changes in the tax code, contributed to growing income inequality. As Secretary of Labor Robert Reich argued in *The Work of Nations*, busi-

ness executives and professionals increasingly see themselves as part of an international elite, not tied to any country. In addition, corporations and capital can increasingly escape the enforced community of any nation.

These developments have reinforced a resistance to redistribution that is at the heart of the current resistance to taxation. Taxes should redistribute income, and in a very imperfect, limited way they do—even in the United States, though much more so in other industrial societies.

Many of the social problems that most deeply trouble Americans would be greatly reduced with a more explicit, more effective redistribution of income through taxes. Such redistribution is needed to create not only more equality of opportunity but also greater social equality, a prerequisite for a stable, civil, democratic nation.

Our failure to do achieve substantial redistribution through a well-developed welfare state, however, feeds what political philosopher Albert O. Hirschman calls “the rhetoric of reaction,” the sense that anything that government does is futile, or jeopardizes liberty and the free market, or perversely creates even worse conditions. This rhetoric of reaction justifies the tax revolt, which in turn undermines the ability to redistribute wealth effectively. That makes government look ineffective, fulfilling the reactionary prophecy.

Federal tax burdens are at least mildly progressive (the top 1 percent of families paid 28.8 percent of family income in 1992, the middle 20 percent paid 19.6 percent) and became a bit more so with Clinton’s 1993 reforms. But federal taxes are still much less progressive than they were in 1977 and are still riddled with loopholes mainly available to the rich. As journalists Donald Bartlett and James Steele, authors of *America: Who Really Pays the Taxes?*, have observed, any increase in taxes on the rich is denounced as class warfare, but any cut in their taxes is labelled “reform.”

Contrary to conservative broadsides, higher taxes do not necessarily cause economic slowdown (or growth, for that matter), according to the 1994 “Economic Report of the President,” an annual study written by the Council of Economic Advisors. But higher tax rates on the rich do increase revenue, even if the rich scramble for ways to avoid taxes.

The statistics belie conservative claims about higher taxes eating away at the fabric of American life. The United States’ total tax share of the gross domestic product (GDP)—30.1 percent—is the lowest of the major industrial countries, many of whom allot more than 40 percent of the GDP to taxes. Instead of rising, federal taxes have consistently claimed about 18 to 20 percent of the GDP for the last 40 years. For the past two decades, state and local government have also consumed a fairly constant share.

Taxes—and “big government”—contribute to a sense of community not only by redistribution to increase equality but also by creating stability. Federal taxes and spending—including the much-maligned deficit—help to counter the destabilizing effects of business cycles. Yet it’s the make-up

***Washington
needs to
spend an
estimated
\$40 billion
more each
year on
infrastructure.***

of government spending, not just its magnitude, that determines the most important economic effects of government. On that count, the United States has done poorly, most notably by overspending on the military and underinvesting in the civilian economy.

Clinton promised to reverse those priorities. But between spending caps Congress approved last year and the administration's decision to shrink military outlays by less than \$14 billion in the 1995 budget, Clinton's budget provides no increase in spending for physical capital, education and training or civilian research, according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a liberal think tank. Compared to most of the '70s, the federal government is now spending one-third less on such projects, calculated as a percentage of the gross domestic product.

Simply to prevent further deterioration of the nation's infrastructure, the EPI estimates, the federal government needs to spend \$40 billion more each year than current levels of roughly \$105 billion. To match the levels of public investment in countries like Germany or Japan, the United States would have to triple or quadruple its current outlays. The EPI proposes a small tax on financial transactions to finance a special Capital Investment Fund. These expenditures would make people feel, rightly, that they were getting something for their taxes. Indeed, a Harris poll last November found only 9 percent of voters were "not at all willing" to be taxed to create jobs.

Conservatives argue that the market is a perfectly self-

regulating system that government and taxes only muck up. But as Joseph Stiglitz, a member of the president's Council of Economic Advisors, has argued, all markets are incomplete and lack perfect information. Since they never meet the textbook model, there's always a case for government intervention (which does not mean that all interventions make sense or can be done effectively).

For example, it's possible to tax (as well as to regulate) economic "bads," like environmentally harmful activities. It's also possible to use taxes to make investments in research or publicly beneficial technologies that private investors are reluctant to undertake. And government could use its vast purchasing power to help create markets for good new technologies, such as solar cells and electric cars.

While it makes sense to keep the tax system itself as simple and free of subsidies, loopholes and deductions as possible, redistributing those taxes to socially desirable economic ends can strengthen the private market as well as help ensure that it serves the common good.

Ultimately, taxes are not just payments for public goods. They are the dues of citizenship. In the long list of identities people have of themselves, the once almost heroic term, "citizen," probably ranks pretty low these days, far beneath "consumer" or "employee." If citizen could mean something again, with a stronger democracy that both made government more accountable and gave people more opportunities to participate, maybe more people could manage a cheer or two for taxes. ▲

MEXICO UNDER SALINAS

By Philip Russell

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B L A C K A M E R I C A

Nationalist movements

W

*The NAACP's
Benjamin
Chavis has
plunged into
a longstanding
debate over
black
nationalism.*

By Salim Muwakkil

When the Rev. Benjamin Chavis last year assumed leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), there was little doubt that he had change on his mind. There was, though, considerable doubt that the group's 64-member board of directors would tolerate significant reform. But during his first year in office Chavis has shaken the country's oldest civil rights organization to its very foundations.

In this process he has also shaken off some supporters. Individuals and groups long sympathetic to the NAACP's civil rights goals are perplexed by some of Chavis' more controversial moves. Since assuming leadership in April 1993, Chavis has coordinated street gang summits in several cities; he's offered support for ending the ban on gays in the military and been an advocate of

expanded gay rights in general; he's negotiated a pact with Denny's restaurants that purportedly offers increased African-American involvement and employment. He's also entered into a relationship with Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI), addressing a crowd from a Black Muslim podium.

And this is just a partial list of Chavis' innovative tactics. Traditionalists understandably are distressed by this break from orthodoxy. And so a group of conservative blacks have created an organization dedicated primarily to attacking and undermining the NAACP. Called "Project 21," the group is funded by the National Center for Public Policy Research, a Washington-based right-wing foundation, and is manned by an articulate bunch of black conservatives who have a special animus for the aggressive new policies of Chavis' NAACP.

"The objective of the 'Take on the NAACP' project is to demonstrate that a large segment of the black community is opposed to the action taken by the leadership," Project 21 Director Ron Nehring told *Emerge* magazine. Nehring, who is white, said the group of black conservatives he has organized is determined to reveal the growing schism between leaders of the NAACP and the people they claim to represent. "If the NAACP leadership was so representative of the black community, why would they take a position on gay rights that flies in the face of the backbone of the community—the church?" Nehring asked.

Project 21 is troubled by Chavis' gestures to the left: his support of gay rights and his liberal politics. Other critics are more concerned about Chavis' overtures to the right. Although support for Farrakhan is construed as radical by the media mainstream, the NOI's actual program has more similarities to that of the Christian Coalition than to the Black Liberation Army. Chavis' attraction to the goals and rhetoric of black nationalism is troubling to many of the die-hard integrationists who comprise the NAACP's core support. Of current concern is the NAACP's upcoming black leadership summit and its insistence on inviting Farrakhan.

Michael Meyers, executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition and a former NAACP assistant director, is more than troubled. "By failing to shun Louis Farrakhan and his ilk," Meyers wrote in a letter to the *New York Times*, "the NAACP has ceded the moral ground and damaged its credibility as a civil rights organization."

Meyers invoked the integrationist traditions of the group's history and chided its current leadership for acquiescing to the whims of "black militant" Chavis. "The former NAACP would have rallied men and women of good

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will against racist diatribes," he added. "But the new NAACP arranges for all-black summits, encourages racial separatism and overlooks black anti-Semitism."

Meyers certainly is not alone. The *Times* itself chastised the group in an editorial headlined "The NAACP's Mistake." But Meyers' ardent integrationism is decidedly out of sync with the nationalist mood now pervading much of the black community.

The findings of a University of Chicago study to be released this month reveals that support for black nationalist goals is at an all-time high among African-Americans. Michael Dawson, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago and co-author of the study, said, "We were stunned by the magnitude of change in support of black nationalist views since 1988," the last time the study was conducted. "Right now, half of the black community supports the idea of an independent black political party," he added. "It has never been that high." Accordingly, many black organizations—and a surprising number of activists—are supportive of the NAACP's decision to extend to Farrakhan an invitation to attend the Black Leadership Summit this spring.

The current turn of many African-Americans toward nationalism is not unprecedented. In fact, as John McCartney points out in his 1992 book *Black Power Ideologies*, the first movement that had as its purpose the eradication of

injustices against African-Americans was a movement that could be classified as black nationalist or separatist. This was the Colonization, or Pan-Negro Movement, and it advocated repatriating African-Americans to a homeland of their own outside the United States.

Many of the most prominent black leaders of the 18th and 19th centuries propounded nationalist principles. And in the 20th century, Marcus Garvey's black nationalist group—the Universal Negro Improvement Association—became the largest black organization in U.S. history.

The NAACP was formed in 1909 to counter many of those nationalist tendencies. And during Garvey's period of prominence, the NAACP was in consistent opposition. The NAACP's integrationist tradition routinely has been identified as nationalism's ideological opposite. Roy Wilkins, who headed the group from 1955 to 1975, derided nationalism as something he called "blackism."

The Rev. Benjamin Hooks succeeded Wilkins, and while he clung to the NAACP's integrationist heritage, he began making subtle changes in emphasis. But it was clear to close observers that he was being reined in by more conservative members of the board. In 1990, Hooks' discontent became public when he helped found an independent group called the National Association of Black Organizations to develop more nationalistic-oriented programs for the African-American community.

The changes hinted by Chavis' new initiatives are more than just tactical adjustments—they are driven by a change in ideology. His embrace of the gang summit movement merged, for the first time, the largely middle-class interests of the NAACP with those of the black underclass. The group's aggressive new stand on moral issues like gay rights shows an increased willingness to challenge the cultural conservatism of clergy-led black leadership. And Chavis' readiness to forge links with black nationalist groups like the NOI—and the support he's received for that from board chairman William Gibson—illustrates the new spirit of rapprochement that seems to be spreading across the African-American community.

But ultimately these changes are more significant for what they say about the state of black America than for what they say about the internal workings of the NAACP; in times of desperation, people do desperate things. ◀

MEXICO

Things fall apart

G

raham Greene, the British author of *The Power and the Glory*, visited Mexico in the spring of 1938, a couple of decades after the socialist revolution of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, to find out the way ordinary people had reacted to the brutal anti-clerical purges of President Plutarco Elías Calles. His journey took him to the states of Tabasco and Chiapas, where churches had been destroyed and priests shot to death or driven out of the region. Greene was appalled by what he saw. "How could a world like this end in anything but war?" he wrote at the time.

More than half a century later, Greene's views have become awkwardly prophetic. Mexico has become a time bomb. The leading presidential candidate has been killed. Political rivalries are insurmountable. Violence is rampant.

Mexico's ruling party no longer seems able to sustain its political balancing act.

By Ilan Stavans

Peasant guerrilla groups are active not only in the state of Chiapas but also in Oaxaca, Yucatán and elsewhere in the southern and central regions. Terrorist acts have taken place in major cities, and a sense of pessimism reigns over the entire population.

Only a short time ago Mexico was an apparently stable nation dreaming of becoming a full partner in the industrialized world, one ready to sell its soul to the devil as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Now the country is on the brink of total political collapse.

The Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), which has dominated Mexican government for six and a half decades, seems no longer able to sustain its political balancing act. The stage seems set for a second revolution not unlike its counterpart in 1910, when Zapata fought for land and justice for the campesino population. It's anybody's guess if the animosity accumulated during years of repres-

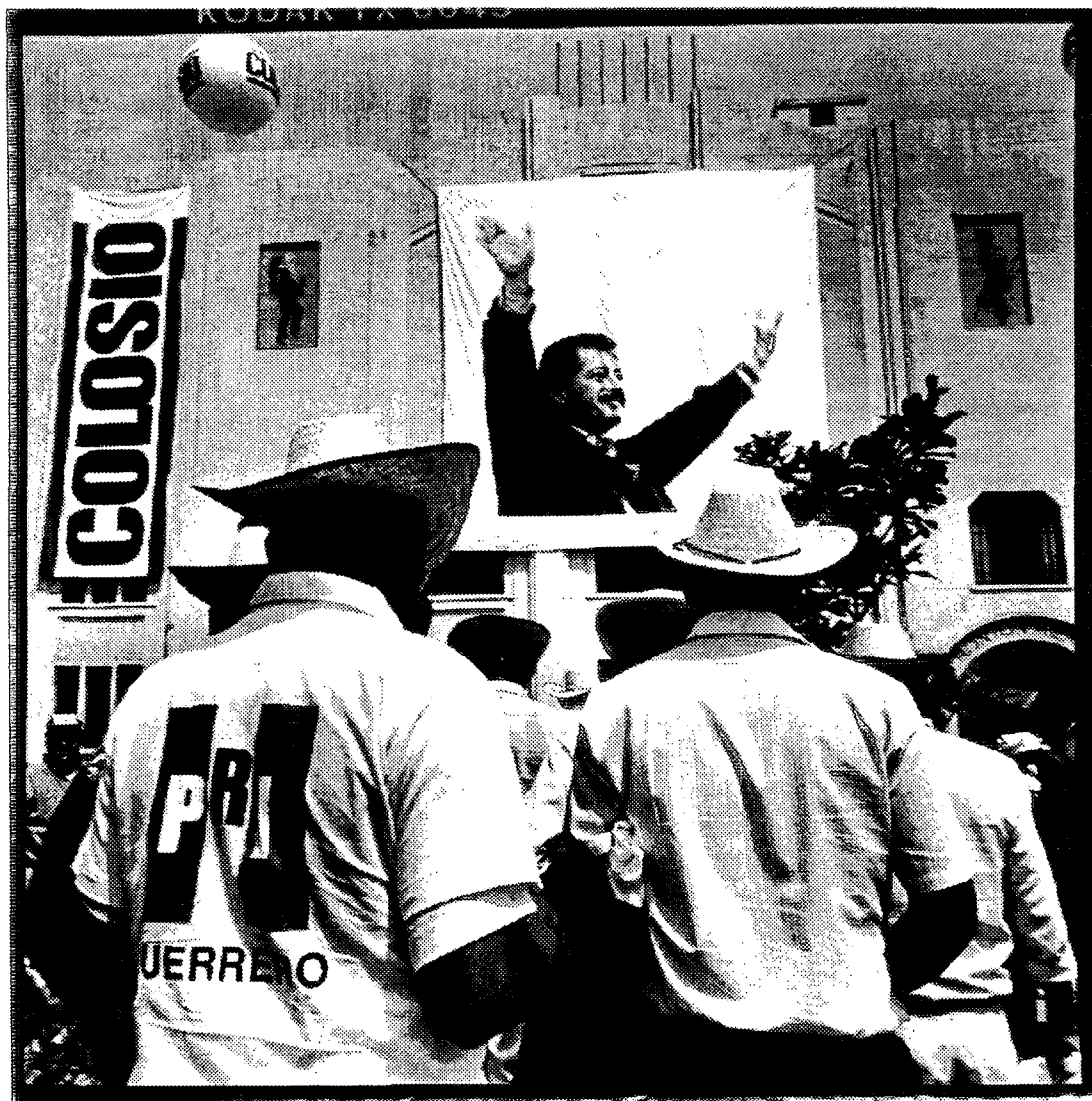
sion and poverty can be restrained, if the country can opt for a peaceful path out of the current crisis.

Last month's assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the presidential candidate of the ruling party, PRI, is only the latest addition to a complicated puzzle. Within hours of Colosio's death, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Mexico's current president, delivered a televised address to the nation, claiming that the country's fundamental principles—freedom, justice and democracy—had been threatened by the assassination. But freedom, justice and democracy have never been the rule in Mexico.

Now that he's buried, Colosio has become a larger-than-life figure, a martyr with a stature he never enjoyed in life. By the time of his death, his presidential campaign was out of focus and criticism of his chief campaign manager, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, was common in the daily press. Zedillo, ironically, has now replaced Colosio as the PRI's candidate. The PRI's old guard likes Zedillo even less than it did Colosio. The American-educated Zedillo lacks political experience and has never run for public office. He has consistently alienated union leaders and has shown little patience for political maneuvering.

Not surprisingly, the old guard pushed for a more experienced alternative. But Salinas did not want to put the early success of his economic reforms, on which his place in history depends, on hold. Consequently, open opposition to Salinas is now being expressed even in the headquarters of the PRI, something unheard of only a few months ago.

Amid new evidence that Colosio's alleged murderer, Mario Aburto Martínez, did not act alone, conspiracy theories about Colosio's death abound. People cannot refrain



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from comparing Colosio's assassination with that of John F. Kennedy.

Many believe Manuel Camacho Solís, who was immensely popular as Salinas' lead envoy to the peace talks in San Cristóbal de las Casas with the Zapatista National Liberation Army, was behind Colosio's death. And if it wasn't Camacho, perhaps it was the Zapatistas themselves. Others go even further, suggesting that Salinas—having second thoughts about his selection of Colosio—himself should be included on the list of possible co-conspirators.

Shortly after Colosio's death, Camacho claimed he would not run for the presidency, and Mexico's Congress approved preliminary constitutional changes to make democracy a reality. But now the whole nation is in fear. Subcomandante Marcos, the mythical leader of the Zapatistas, has become a symbol of resistance for the lower class. And the riots that erupted in Mexico City as demonstrators supporting opposition leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas clashed with the police are further evidence of the growing impatience of the middle class, which is increasingly fed up with

promises of freedom and justice. The army, accused of civil rights abuses during its Chiapas performance, is nervous.

The months between now and August, when presidential elections are scheduled, promise to be volatile ones. Mexico has no democratic tradition. Since colonial times, federal, state and local institutions have been intrusive, tyrannical, dogmatic and intransigent. Corruption and fraud, the law of the land, have proven impossible to eradicate.

In power since 1929, the PRI has perfected a dictatorial system in which dissent is welcomed only to be quickly erased from public

debate. And so the 1994 transition will certainly be bumpy. Salinas and his party seem to be losing control of the situation.

Although a stable neighbor is obviously in Washington's best interest, the most sensitive approach the Clinton administration can take is to watch carefully while leaving Mexico's political fate to its citizens. An economic partner might be useful, but a stable neighbor is essential. And NAFTA, which was at first embraced by many Mexicans as a popular panacea, has now come to represent an evil emblem of foreign manipulation.

How could a world like this end in anything but war? Graham Greene's question remains unanswered. For now, Mexico's best hope is that democracy will prevail, even if liberty, freedom, and justice for all remain abstract ideas. ◀

Ilan Stavans, a Mexican novelist and critic who teaches at Amherst College, is the author of *The Hispanic Condition* (Harper-Collins), forthcoming in August. He is currently editing *The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays*.

E L S A L V A D O R

They call it democracy

*Just two years
after the
peace accord,
El Salvador
seems to be
veering toward
“a new type of
authoritarian-
ism.”*

By David R. Dye
SAN SALVADOR,
EL SALVADOR

In a homily marking the 14th anniversary of the slaying of Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero, Jesuit priest Rodolfo Cardenal remarked, “The March 20 election had much of the past about it, and much of fear.”

International observers and journalists watching the balloting took note of the past, duly reporting the numerous anomalies that plagued the election process. None was as meticulous as lawyer Felix Ulloa—head of an oversight committee made up of Salvadoran political parties—who, by the time the vote count started, had tallied 151 violations of the country’s election code by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal itself.

As expected, the governing ARENA party won the elections. At 49.2 percent of the vote, ARENA candidate Armando Calderon Sol fell just short of the first-round

victory he yearned for. But the result was skewed enough to leave left-wing candidate Ruben Zamora, backed by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a distant second with 25 percent, and the Christian Democrats, with 16 percent, in the dust. No one doubts that Calderon will win the April 24 runoff against Zamora by a hefty margin.

Despite its blemishes, and despite El Salvador’s long history of election fraud, observers gave the March 20 balloting mostly “acceptable” marks. They argued that the voting was peaceful and in general orderly. Close to 85 percent of the potential voters were registered.

While all of this is true, it fails to place the March 20 vote in the perspective of El Salvador’s two-year-old peace accords. At first, the accords seemed to promise Salvadorans a negotiated revolution—but now they threaten to leave the country in the grip of a party dictatorship.

El Salvador’s 1992 U.N.-brokered peace pact, which ended a 12-year civil war, mandated the most thorough reform of a country’s political system ever seen in Latin America—overhaul of the police and military, reform of the judiciary, a new election code, and much more. The goal was to solidify democracy and root out human rights abuses. The March 20 elections, the first since the peace and the first ever with the ex-guerrillas of the FMLN participating, were to crown the process.

Instead, the right has manifested a tenacious resistance to reform. When the top ranks of El Salvador’s armed forces were purged last year—after investigative bodies, including a U.N.-sponsored “Truth Commission,” documented their part in torture and murder during the ’80s—the country’s ARENA-dominated congress promptly passed a blanket amnesty to save their skins. The major link in the chain of official cover-up, the corrupt Salvadoran Supreme Court, then stonewalled calls that it resign en masse. Such blatant disregard for the intent of the accords set the stage for the death-squad-style murders of FMLN leaders Francisco Velis, Heleno Hernan Castro, Mario Lopez and others as the campaign gathered force.

Unfortunately, the election process has been of a piece with the rest of the Salvadoran government’s compliance with the accords. “After battling impunity in the judiciary and armed forces,” Ulloa comments, “we have run up against a new kind of impunity—the electoral kind.”

As in the case of the army purge, the government of outgoing President Alfredo Cristiani had to be dragged kicking and screaming into half-doing its duty to organize a fair election. Despite numerous complaints that it was infringing on the right of many Salvadorans to vote, the tribunal did nothing to correct anomalies until subjected to intense inter-

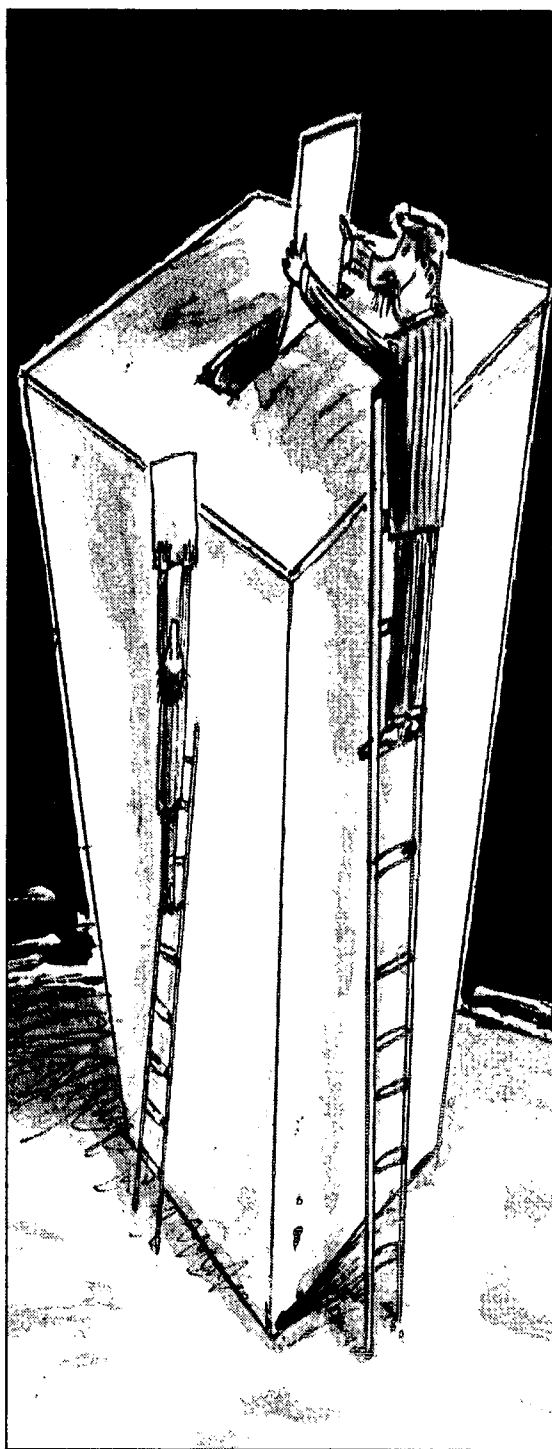
national pressure. Even with that pressure, it managed to avoid getting mandatory voting cards into the hands of 340,000 voters and denied them outright to 80,000 others (many of whom live in zones formerly controlled by the guerrillas) because they could not produce birth certificates to prove who they were.

With thousands of international observers present, this was not the blatant fraud of the past, when the military stole ballot boxes in the middle of the night so that the tribunal could doctor the results. The idea this time was mainly to keep the turnout down, giving an advantage to ARENA, which was backed with big money, hordes of campaign workers and a hard core of traditional voters.

Political analysts warn that a Calderon presidency could fatally undermine the peace accords. Carlos Ramos, editor of the news bulletin *Proceso*, voices the blunt opinion that "if ARENA wins the presidency, Calderon will try to make the accords disappear from the political scene."

This judgment is based on more than Calderon's stated position, later amended, that since he hadn't signed the accords it wasn't his duty to fulfill them. Calderon is leader of the extreme ARENA right and heir to the political fortune of death squad king Roberto D'Aubuisson. He makes even some of the elite uneasy, though they bankrolled him out of fear of Zamora and the left.

Calderon is poised to follow Cristiani's lead by attempting to vitiate the progress that has undeniably been made over the last two years in endowing Salvadorans with a set of reformed institutions. A case in point is the National Civilian Police (PNC), a promising experiment in creating a law enforcement body trained not to abuse the public. Some of its recruits come from the FMLN; others, after screening,



from the discredited National Police. They receive instruction from competent international police advisers. A Norwegian police adviser doing poll-watching for the U.N. on election day remarked, "The new police are receiving excellent instruction, but everything depends on the leadership they get from the top."

And the actions of those on the top have not been reassuring. Cristiani has already taken care to insinuate former police officers who are known human rights violators into the command of the new force, beginning the process of its corruption. Many expect Calderon to complete the process by transferring the rest of the old National Police wholesale into the PNC, overwhelming the new recruits and their modern training.

The ominous signs of backsliding, in the midst of ARENA's solid victory, make El Salvador's brightest minds worry about the future. Says social scientist Hector Dada: "The peace accords opened the possibility for a transition to democracy, but also to a new type of authoritarianism." Though people like Dada don't have a label for the political regime they see emerging from the peace process, comparisons to Mexico's undemocratically entrenched Revolutionary Institutional Party are becoming more and more frequent in discussions of El Salvador's political direction.

In part, this is because ARENA's commitment to democracy is questionable. Abraham Rodriguez, a founder of the Christian Democratic party, argues, "ARENA would have done anything to retain power, had it been in jeopardy in this election." El Salvador's elite has lost control of politics just once in this century, from 1980 to

1989, when U.S. counterinsurgency strategists tapped the Christian Democrats to make reforms and thwart the guerrillas. Under Cristiani, most of the reform has been reversed, and the economically powerful are back in the saddle.

In addition, ARENA has shown a surprising ability to win votes. In large part, it won this time by nurturing two kinds of fear. One is the traditional fear of "communism," inculcated by decades of authoritarian rule; the other the terror that the economic incompetence of the left could cause El Salvador to slide into the mire of ungovernability that

plagues post-Sandinista Nicaragua.

ARENA also benefited from citizen apathy. For all the crucial importance of what have been called the "elections of the century," few Salvadorans took an interest in them: close to 45 percent of citizens abstained from voting.

For this result, the left bears a large share of responsibility. Throughout these two years, the leaders of the FMLN have displayed a penchant for behind-the-scenes negotiation with Cristiani and with powerful international actors like the U.N. and the United States as a means of leveraging a very partial compliance with the accords, instead of mobilizing their supporters into the streets to demand publicly that they be fulfilled to the letter. By not involving more people in defense of the accords, the FMLN leaders have not given them reasons to believe that voting will change anything.

Despite these errors, FMLN leaders congratulate themselves on becoming El Salvador's second most powerful political force. Though at press time the votes were not all counted, the "Frente" will likely occupy 21 or 22 out of 84 seats in El Salvador's legislature, an impressive showing for a party that has been legally registered for little more than a year and that is competing in electoral politics for the first time. Gerson Martinez, a leader of the Popular Liberation Forces, the largest grouping in the FMLN, asserts: "Given that we have just come out of a war, and people had not seen our electoral face, we have done well."

But the left's legislative presence will not translate into much power. Helped along by smaller right-wing parties, ARENA (with 39 votes) will control the congress as well as the presidency and most town halls. Only on extraordinary votes requiring a two-thirds majority will the opposition, composed of the left and the Christian Democrats, have any bargaining power. One of these is the upcoming election of a new supreme court, a golden opportunity to deal a blow against impunity by electing honest judges.

If they want to, the United States and the U.N. will also have a say in the Salvadoran future. They could use their leverage to curb Calderon's authoritarian instincts and put the peace plan back on track, in particular by pressing for judicial reform and defending the integrity of the National Civilian Police.

An anecdote making the rounds in San Salvador suggests, however, that Calderon may be a hard man to press.

Advised after his first-round lead to make peace with current Salvadoran Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, Calderon reportedly quipped, "What do I need the archbishop for?" The fact that he doesn't know indicates that the mentality that led to the murder of Rivera's predecessor 14 years ago is still very much alive. ◀

David R. Dye writes regularly on Central America for *In These Times*.

"The voices he has recorded, the relics he has seen,
are haunting — and the raw material of a terrific book."

— David Remnick, author of *Lenin's Tomb*

THE UNQUIET GHOST

RUSSIANS
REMEMBER
STALIN

Forty years after Stalin's death, journalist Adam Hochschild documents his crucial role in the Russian Psyche. Talking to prison survivors and retired concentration camp guards, keepers of the KGB archives and reformist historians, Hochschild's journey across the emotionally and physically scarred Russian landscape reveals much about the potential victim and the potential executioner inside us all.

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SOUTH AFRICA

Best of times, worst of times

*Today,
the country
prepares for
its first truly
democratic
election.
Tomorrow,
a civil war?*

By April Oliver
JOHANNESBURG

Presidential candidate Nelson Mandela maintains his usual dignity at the press conference, even though the hotel where it is being held has just received another bomb threat. The reporters are understandably restless; they don't like being sniffed by police dogs, don't like having their press conference delayed. Mandela pacifies them by answering all questions asked. Most have to do with the state of emergency in Natal and the violence that has broken out in Johannesburg.

He says that the state of emergency was "a last resort to prevent further loss of life ... to stem the tide of violence, which, if left unchecked, will engulf us all." His voice cracks with laryngitis from a harsh campaign schedule.

Mandela will almost certainly be elected president in South Africa's first truly democratic election on April 26-28. Polls promise a landslide win by the African

National Congress; the only issue is whether the party will command the two-thirds majority needed to be able to rewrite the draft constitution. With so much power to be concentrated in the hands of one party, many fear the consequences. Reporters ask Mandela if and when he will employ his emergency powers in the years to come. "It depends on the prevailing circumstances," says Mandela. Exacerbating concern about the ANC's future handling of power was a special dispensation Mandela received from the government, prohibiting a weapons search at ANC headquarters.

Given the history of the ANC, Mandela grudgingly acknowledges the irony of the ANC supporting a state of emergency in Natal, enforced by South African Defence Force troops. He argues, however, that the action is intended to support democratic political activity, not to repress it. The people of Natal "deserve the right to express themselves without threats," he admonishes. "This state of emergency has been proclaimed so that the

election can proceed in an atmosphere of calm."

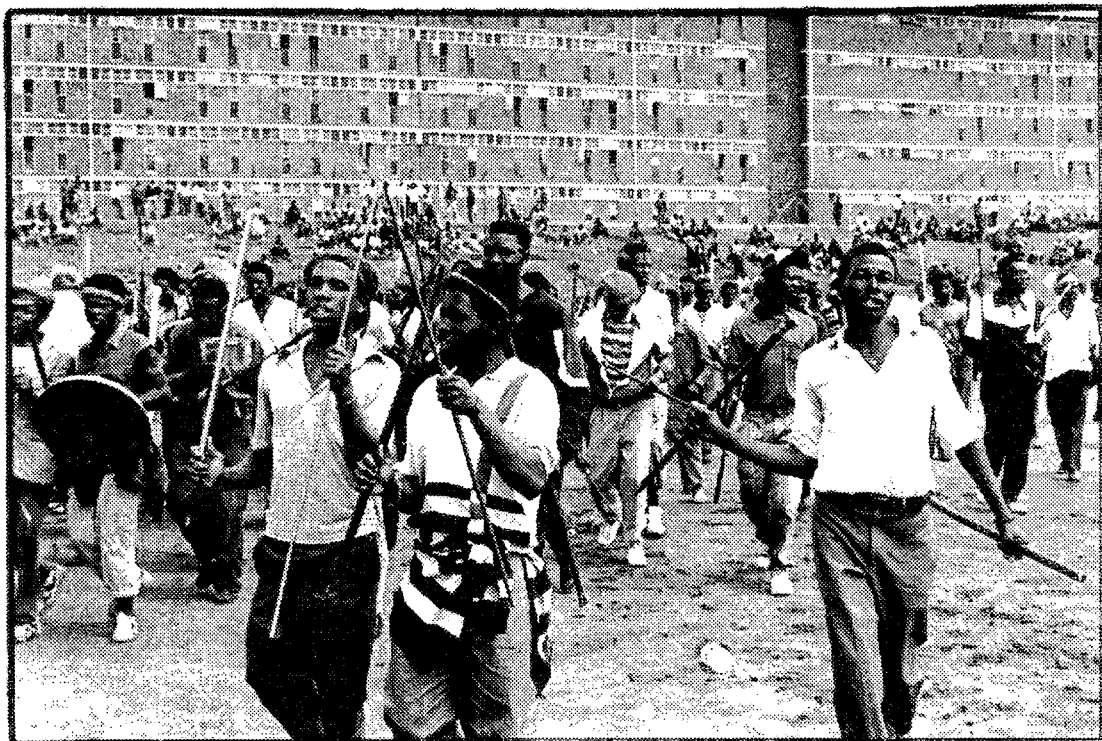
Mandela and the South African government are faced with a ticklish challenge: how to respond to the rejectionist politics of Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who has threatened civil war if his demands for a separate Zulu state are not met. Military analysts claim Buthelezi could cause real problems, even though he doesn't have access to anti-tank equipment or missiles. "We don't know how many AK-47s there are in Natal," says one military spokesman. "There are probably too many to count."

Buthelezi brought his threats to the streets of Johannesburg in the last week of March. Debate still rages about who started the shooting, which has deeply unsettled the city. At least 30 people were killed during a demonstration march by Zulus through the city's business district. Inkatha leaders allege that the ANC placed snipers on top of its headquarters to disrupt the march. ANC leaders say their armed security guards shot in self-defense against an armed mob that wantonly attacked them. All sides blame the South African police for providing deplorable security.

The incident marked the worst violence in the history of the business district of Johannesburg. It represents a dramatic shift in the battleground for the hearts and minds of the new South Africa. While the townships around Johannesburg and the countryside, especially Natal, have long been soaked in blood, the tall buildings and busy streets of downtown Johannesburg have been temples of profit. The business of Johannesburg is making money, not war.

Throughout the week, many businesses in downtown Johannesburg closed early, fearful of more chaos and death. One hotbed of activity, however, was to be found just around the corner from the ANC headquarters, at the Carlton Gym. Even the morning after the killings, the gym was

packed. The only divisions here in an early morning aerobics class are between those who can keep up with the energetic instructor and those who can't. This is the best of the New South Africa. Buckets of sweat pour from the bodies of those in the mixed-race class: young, old, black, white, Indian and "colored" all toil alike. People of all races and tribes casually interact, cheering each other on. After class, they share Nautilus equipment, water fountains and rest rooms.



Inkatha Freedom Party supporters during 1991 violence.

But will the violence intrude on such oases? With the imposition of a state of emergency in Natal, Inkatha's base of operations, the civil strife may move permanently to the streets of Johannesburg. Says Inkatha spokesperson Musa Zondi: "We know what happened ... in Johannesburg was premeditated by the ANC. As a result, we cannot guarantee the future of the Johannesburg/Pretoria area."

If the violence continues in Johannesburg, a state of emergency may even be imposed on districts here, according to government sources. But ANC national chair Thabo Mbeki denies this will happen. "We've been expecting an escalation of violence around here for a long time. There have been a lot of arrogant people walking around with guns, terrorizing people. But once we decided to hit back, they turned and ran away. This will teach them a lesson: they can't get away with such arrogance."

Nevertheless, the streets of Johannesburg are eerily silent, especially in the evenings. One must travel several kilometers to the suburbs to find any night life. At Rockefeller's pub in Yeoville, a live band plays American hits, including those of Tina Turner. The restaurant is jammed with young people of all races, hanging out. The fashions of the '60s are in vogue: bell bottoms, choker necklaces, Twiggy haircuts, platform shoes. Across the street, a giant picture of Bob Dylan entices crowds to drink at a bar called Dylan's.

Rockefeller's pub, like the Carlton Gym, has evolved into a symbol of the New South Africa. Young people here mingle and chat; even interracial love affairs bud. And while the passions and fashions of America in the '60s are in evidence, the reality of South Africa in the '90s is always near at hand.

Just several months ago at this very spot a handful of members of the PAC—the Pan-Africanist Congress, a radical black group which has long argued that whites should not be included in a new regime—were arrested just before planting a bomb.

And the violence and volatility of South African politics similarly touched members of an American delegation from Congress recently visiting South Africa. The American visitors, including Reps. John Lewis (D-GA), Pat Schroeder (D-CO), and Kweisi Mfume (D-MD), were caught in crossfire while traveling by bus to meet with Mbeki. No one was hurt, but the experience was sobering. In the wake of the shooting, Mfume expressed his concern that "the process is breaking down. Clearly the people who are committing this violence want to disrupt the election process."

Mbeki admits that "these are difficult times." As *In These Times* went to press, a high-level meeting had been called, gathering Mandela, President F.W. de Klerk, Inkatha leader Buthelezi and Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini. But with the introduction of troops into Natal, efforts at political reconciliation may be doomed, and the conflict could mushroom into civil war. Inkatha youth leader Zondi sums up the mood in the Natal city of Ulundi: "We are filled with disbelief, resentment and shock. The impact here is strongly felt by our people. I think there could be an explosion ahead." ◀

April Oliver is a foreign-affairs correspondent for the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*.

A BORTION

The un-pregnancy pill

A

*RU486 may
profoundly
change the
terms of the
abortion
debate.*

By Katharine Greider

Americans who regard abortion either as an irredeemable atrocity or as one of those rights that belongs always and only to the individual have long since quit trying to convince each other. Instead, they spend their energies chasing after the souls not yet spoken for—that large group of Americans whose ideas about abortion are not so fixed and who remain, perhaps, persuadable.

Most people make their judgments about abortion based not on a single crisp line of moral reasoning but on a sticky, highly situational sense of what's right. Tom Smith, of the National Opinion Research Center, divides the American public into three groups: about one-tenth are entirely against abortion for any reason, about three-tenths are pro-choice through and through, and the rest are "very conflicted."

Many Americans find early abortions more

acceptable than later abortions. A vast majority of Americans support abortion for so-called "hard" reasons such as rape, threat to the mother's health or serious fetal defects, but fewer support the choice of abortion if a mother is single or poor—or if she has simply decided that she does not want another child. A substantial number oppose federal funding for abortions, or favor waiting periods and parental-consent requirements, all of which seems to reflect a desire to "discourage but permit" abortion, in the words of James Nelson, an ethicist at The Hastings Center. When it comes to abortion, gut reactions matter.

This may be one reason pro-life activists so abhor that "human pesticide," the abortion pill RU486. Once this drug enters the American scene—and enter, one day, it will, despite the continued reluctance of its maker, Roussel-UCLAF, to sell it in this politically

bruising and intensely litigious environment—it will provide American women with the option of abortion in a radically different form. No one believes that it would replace all or even most surgical abortions. But an abortion pill could ultimately change the way many Americans experience, react to and interpret abortion, and thus shift the ideological ground of the debate.

Abortion rights activist Lawrence Lader has pointed out that RU486 abortion deprives pro-life champions of one of their most persuasive visual aids: the image of the fetus itself, with tiny arms, legs and other accouterments of a human being. So far, RU486 works *only* during the beginning of a pregnancy; it is approved for use up to nine weeks after the beginning of the last menstrual period in Britain, seven weeks in France. This is earlier even than many first-trimester surgical abortions, for which the optimal window is around seven to 10 weeks. (Only 9 percent of abortions in the United States take place in the second trimester.)

The time restriction guarantees that the embryo, beheld by the naked eye, will not resemble a baby; a woman may see whitish placental tissue, according to a physician at Planned Parenthood, but if she does not look for it, she could miss it altogether. "It's a scientific fact that [RU486] kills an unborn baby whose heart has started to beat," says National Right to Life Committee Education Director Richard Glasow. "That's a pretty clear personification." Etienne-Emile Baulieu, the French scientist who helped to develop RU486 and who tirelessly promotes it, proffers a different image: "Menstrual-like blood flows, and the pea-sized embryo is washed from the body."

Whether one image is more convincing than the other seems as much a question of psychology as of ethics. "If you are interested in consensus," says Patricia King, a professor

at Georgetown Law Center who has written on bioethics and reproductive policy, "then you clearly sell a policy that focuses on early abortion."

In RU486 abortion, the woman is more than the recipient of a doctor's ministrations. She takes the pill herself, her body then sheds the pregnancy and she usually collects the tissue herself. How Americans might react to the intimacy of this procedure is a matter for speculation. Glasow, of Right to Life, emphasizes the difficulties of the RU486 abortion. It is, contrary to early reports, more painful (surgical abortion is generally performed with anesthesia), messier and more time-consuming than surgical aspiration. Of course, this could change as procedures and dosages are refined; women's health advocate Marie Bass compares the drug today to the first generation of birth control pills.

Still, to recognize a pregnancy early enough to have a RU486 abortion and follow up on its present requirements, a woman has to "have her act together," as Glasow puts it. This could make it especially difficult for pro-lifers to portray women, as they now tend to do, as naive victims of abortion profiteers. Ethicist Nelson observes that the "sense of proximity, of causal closeness" in RU486 abortion could reinforce perceptions of abortion as a fundamentally private act.

Will people perceive as somehow less serious a process that, instead of probing the uterus with surgical instruments, simply pulls the hormonal rug out from under a woman's pregnancy? RU486 interferes with the work of the hormone progesterone, which thickens the uterine lining for pregnancy. Two days after taking the pill, a woman receives a prostaglandin, a hormonelike drug that brings on contractions. This process is hardly "natural." Yet it closely mimics a process the human body carries out with some regularity. One in five recognized pregnancies miscarries, and the development of more sensitive pregnancy tests has led scientists to estimate that as many as half of all fertilized eggs are sloughed from the body, never to be born.

Some, most notably Baulieu himself, have argued that RU486 draws abortion within a hair's breadth of contraception. In this view, the pill is a "contragestive" that neither "excises a fetus" nor blocks the meeting of sperm and egg. Such a view suggests a new middle ground in the abortion debate, proposing that the development of life be seen as a continuum along which fertilization is just one of several

defining moments.

Would Americans accept this perspective? The World Health Organization is testing RU486 as a means of blocking pregnancy up to five days after unprotected sex. The pill might well take effect after fertilization but before implantation—a time during which, in the estimation of many physicians, pregnancy has not yet begun. In fact, even now in the United States doctors may legally prescribe a high dosage of birth control pills as a "morning-after pill" designed to either impede fertilization or to block implantation—one never knows which. And the intrauterine device, or IUD,



commonly described as a method of birth control, is considered an abortifacient by some because it *may* work by stopping the fertilized egg from attaching to the uterine wall.

The Right to Life Committee makes no objection to contraceptive pills. And it doesn't take a position on the morning-after pill, a matter "between you, your physician and your clergyman." It opposes the IUD. How vivid are these distinctions? Some will see the pro-life position as holding the moral high ground; others will see it as splitting hairs.

If the American public responds differently to RU486 than to surgical abortion, that will be only an indication of its tendency to be swayed by "what's in your face," says King. Yet if RU486 removes some of the emotional, viscerally persuasive symbols of the anti-abortion movement, then this movement will be forced to rely more fully on its moral arguments—against RU486 abortion in particular, and abortion in general. Many years down the road, RU486 and other new fertility-control technologies may offer a telling glimpse into what it is about abortion that so stirs the American imagination—and what leaves it unmoved. ◀

Katharine Greider is a freelance writer in New York City.

I N T H E A R T S

Failure of the will

Leni Riefenstahl's tragedy was not her choice of politics, but that she had none at all.

By Pat Dowell

The most celebrated woman director in film history is also the most infamous: Leni Riefenstahl, the only notable filmmaker to emerge from the Third Reich. She is world renowned for two '30s films filled with staggeringly beautiful compositions. *Olympia*, about the 1936 Berlin games, is filled with superlative bodies at rest and in motion. *Triumph of the Will* mythologizes the ranks of torchlit Nazi cohorts rallying at a 1935 party congress. Under Hitler's patronage, Riefenstahl transformed the documentary; she has spent her subsequent lifetime (she's in her 90s) trying to separate politics from her art.

Like her films, Riefenstahl herself has an undeniable vigor and fascination, whether equivocating at length in her recently published autobiography or trying to take over the camera

in Ray Müller's three-hour documentary about her. Müller originally titled the film *The Power of Images*, but the British distributors have inanely substituted the title *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*.

The film itself is rather wonderful and horrible. Riefenstahl, naggingly reminiscent of Dorian Gray, presents a strong and vibrant presence to the world at her advanced age. Her face is unnaturally smoothed by many plastic surgeries, which have given her that telltale slash of a mouth. She is currently into undersea filming with her longtime companion, a middle-aged guy who—yes, it must be said—resembles an Aryan icon. They suit up and dive for hours, wrestling unwieldy cameras; Leni pats enormous stingrays on the head.

Director Müller seems hardly a match for her at times. He takes her through her biography, patiently asking questions and fleshing out her reminiscences with photographs, archival footage and clips from movies she acted in or directed.

She hassles him about how to light her, where to put the camera, what should go in the background. When they walk through the Nuremberg arena where she filmed *Triumph of the Will* in 1934, she grabs Müller by the shoulders and tries to shake him into compliance with her technical advice. She's still the preening star, still the perfectionist director. For his part, Müller is passive and doggedly dedicated to pursuing details. (It's his most endearing quality as a documentarian, in fact.)

Riefenstahl recounts the ingenious and demanding techniques she invented on the spot for her films—the physical hardships, the months of planning camera angles, the digging of pits to film athletes against the sky. She devised inventive tracking shots, used slow motion and worked out



The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl
Directed by Ray Müller



dynamic editing strategies in advance. She even printed some brief shots backwards in the dazzling diving sequences of *Olympia* to enhance the sense of athletes borne aloft in flight. Müller's film deftly deconstructs the work behind the seamless vision on the screen.

Müller also pursues her on the eternal questions. What did she know and when did she know it? If she was not a Nazi, not even a Nazi sympathizer, as she claims, how could she have remained Hitler's confidante? Of course, these days she denies she was, and Müller presses her with contradictions from the pens of Goebbels and Goering. She simply, pathetically, evades and denies.

And so Müller explores the evidence of her work. *Triumph of the Will* was explicitly Nazi in its subject matter, but *Olympia* exalts sheer physical grace. Always an admirer of muscles and unblemished skin, Riefenstahl took her aesthetic interests into Africa in her 70s, photographing the Nuba tribe. The taint of fascism has proved ineradicable wherever she goes, prompting critics to apply rather deeper scrutiny of her avowedly apolitical endeavors than most critics ever apply to films.

Riefenstahl's protestations of innocence don't ring true, but the surprising thing is that by the end of the movie she seems sincere in her ignorance of what she did. But even if she had no intent to give vision to the politics of Hitler, does that matter? The films have a life of their own, a meaning of their own; art is not always a triumph of the artist's will. Because we are social animals, immersed in culture, there is a meaning beyond the individual's intent.

What the documentary makes clear about Riefenstahl's creative will is that she approached all her projects primarily as technical problems in the mechanics of beauty. If she presents a cautionary tale, it is the story of the artist who has no politics, not too much. As the opening credit sequence suggests in its juxtaposition of images, Riefenstahl saw a tropical fish, an African warrior, a Nazi storm trooper as equivalent plastic opportunities for the shaping of images. They were without meaning to her, and so without politics.

Riefenstahl is hardly alone in her fetishized professionalism. Look around you today, and you will see countless examples of apolitical and amoral creative forces entertaining us to death. There are Riefenstahls in America on Madison Avenue and in the Burbank Studios. It's only because the Third Reich enjoys a unique status, certified indisputably and universally as evil, that all of Riefenstahl's work has been widely examined for its political implications—while Hollywood's fair-haired boys and girls engage in creating "just entertainment."

The lesson of Riefenstahl's wonderful, horrible life is exactly the opposite of the common wisdom about her: politics didn't poison her art, which, seen today, appears detached from community and a political point of view. Her films now seem not so much explicitly fascist as starved of politics and the messy human light it casts. They remain great technical achievements of heartless perfection, tributes to the eternally baffling relationship between art and moral value, between an artist's purpose and the meaning of her work, between beauty and truth. ◀

IN PRINT

Local hero

By John B. Judis

Murray Kempton is an outstanding columnist—the *Chicago Tribune*'s Mike Royko is his only peer, in my opinion—and has written two deservedly acclaimed books. But I am not sure whether this huge collection of columns, essays and reviews over the last three decades really stands on its own merits. Kempton's best columns are one-point epiphanies that illuminate a day or week, but then begin to flicker and fade. And his essays, while superior to what one can generally find in the current *Harper's*, *New York Review of Books* or *New Republic*, are a notch below those of writers like Dwight Macdonald or Norman Mailer, whose musings still seem fresh and provocative long after they were written.

Like the best columnists, Kempton is ultimately a local writer. He doesn't write about City Hall, but he mirrors the preoccupations of several generations of Manhattanites with Communists, jazz musicians, the Mafia, Roy Cohn, Michael Milken and Malcolm X. His columns, unlike his essays, are written in a straightforward, declaratory style and usually pivot on a single irony. Writing of Shearson Lehman Hutton CEO Peter Cohen's ouster in July 1990, Kempton compares Wall Street financiers with the Communist commissars that ruined the economies of Eastern Europe. "Both enter the world of work certified by schools of the sort that stuff their students with theory while protecting them from every contagion of familiarity with practice," he writes. "A Marxist-Leninist Institute degree may be a worse credential for productive service than a Wharton MBA, but the distinction is not broad."

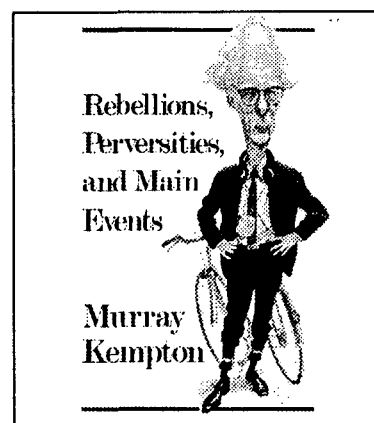
Kempton is also a master of the personal tribute. He celebrated the 50th anniversary of blues singer Bessie Smith's death with a column about her talents as a poet, making the

reader hear for the first time such lines as "Once ain't for always and two ain't but twice." His column memorializing a little-known Communist turned successful realtor takes as its starting point a *New York Times* obituary describing him as "very active in liberal causes." Kempton writes, with palpable annoyance: "Very active in liberal causes' my foot. Lew Wasserman of the Music Corporation of America is very active in liberal causes. Charlie Keith was a dedicated Communist in the early thirties and into the forties and would probably have died one if the party, or any other party for that matter, had been adequate to his nobility of spirit."

By contrast, Kempton's essays, written over the years primarily for *The New Republic* and *The New York Review of Books*, are often difficult and even rococo in style. Kempton is addicted to double negatives and elliptical phrasing ("I don't think it can be sensibly argued that Mencken did not stay too late at his trade"). At his best, however, Kempton's writing contains nuance and rhythm that is difficult to find in much contemporary writing. He writes of former columnist Westbrook Pegler, "He was not a Marxist sportswriter, but something better, an anarcho-syndicalist one. It is 44 years since the Chicago White Sox threw a World Series, but the Westbrook Pegler who could rail at a Postmaster General if he stole a five-cent stamp still thinks of Joe Jackson and Hal Chase as toilers so badly paid that taking bribes was only a way to get back a bit of their own."

Most of Kempton's longer essays are meditations on the radical politics of the left and right, although he also covers some presidents and presidential candidates. His strength in these essays is also his weakness. He is above faction and ideology and beyond bitterness. But Kempton fails to convey a compelling understanding of the period, and not merely the people, he is writing about. His judgment of people is unique and discerning, but his view of history is pedestrian at best.

One clue to this failing may lie in the only biographical fact to emerge in this collection—Kempton's membership in the '30s in the Young Communist League. What he seems to have derived from that experience was a fascination with the form, but an allergy to the substance, of political commitment. Kempton can write sympathetically about Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers while acknowledging Hiss'



**Rebellions, Perversities,
and Main Events**
By Murray Kempton
Times Books
\$78 pp., \$27.50

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guilt almost offhandedly, because his interest is not in Hiss's guilt, nor in the dynamics of the Cold War, but in the irony of Hiss' concealment. Kempton is the author of one of the first revisionist views of Eisenhower—in a 1967 essay—but he is entirely concerned with the former president's guile and intelligence rather than with his success or stature as a chief executive.

When Kempton condemns or criticizes his personages, it is for trying to simplify or hide their own complex motivations. He never engages them on the level of their ideas. Indeed, he stays away from profiling politicians or writers who have substantial views. He writes of ex-new leftist Jane Alpert: "We have not before been confronted with a generation of radicals with so high a proportion of those who became tragic figures without ever managing to seem serious ones. And yet, even though the contagion of Miss Alpert's self-contempt works very powerfully indeed, might not her candor be one more piece of self-deception, some new operation of an incurable habit of refusing to give due notice to the complexities of nature?"

In abandoning communism and Marxism, Kempton seems to have abandoned any attempt to systematize his own point of view. Like other refugees from the hothouse '30s, he rejected not only ideology but also theory. Kempton concludes his collection with a column celebrating the fall of Marx and Freud. Entitled "The Gift of Thought," it

could equally be called "The Rejection of Thought." Kempton takes Marx's fall as a given, but to demonstrate that Freud was "wrongheaded," he cites the difference between what Freud called the "Oedipus Complex" and the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. It's a fatuous argument unworthy of a college sophomore—Freud always conceived of art and myth as rationalizations rather than literal portrayals of forbidden impulses. Kempton then smugly concludes, "Too many of us have been too beguiled by those terrible simplifiers, the systematizers, to keep up the practice [of thought] and, now that their spell seems broken, the prospect of being forced to work at it again is most exhilarating."

Where Kempton stops short of attempting the wide synthesis or the sweeping generalization, other writers take this leap. Some tumble into the ridiculous, but others, like Mailer, Macdonald or James Baldwin, are able to challenge their readers' understanding of history and human nature. Mailer's essay, "The White Negro," or Macdonald's review of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible or James Baldwin's profile of Elijah Muhammed are beyond anything in this collection—not because these men wrote better than Kempton, but because they dared a larger view of things. Kempton's profiles are deeply intelligent, but they remain lacking in reach and will probably not outlive readers' interest in the particulars he describes. ▽

Around and around

By Ilan Stavans

Carlos Fuentes is a seasoned postmodern ventriloquist. Born in Panama City in 1928, the son of a Mexican diplomat, and raised in Argentina and Washington, D.C., he cultivates the persona of a multinational hybrid. He uses the novel, his favorite genre, as an anything-goes container, combining history, philosophy, literary criticism and popular culture. He has been celebrated as a multicultural renaissance man, and his work is still obligatory reading in college courses. But his audience, mostly a remnant of a bygone decade when Latin American letters mattered in Europe and the United States, is rapidly shrinking. Fuentes seems to have saturated the world with his repetitiveness.

Fuentes has an insatiable thirst for seeing his name in print. He is frequently quoted on just about every topic and current event: the campesino uprising in Chiapas; sex, tyranny and democracy among Hispanics; the Balkanization of Eastern Europe; French politics; First Amendment rights; and so on. His charisma makes him popular on the college lecture circuit. And yet, despite his formidable gifts as a fiction writer and cultural commentator, his recent creations are flat, cartoonish proxies for allegorical truths.

His newest collection of stories, *The Orange Tree*, originally published in Spain early last year, is a virtual compilation of Fuentes' obsessions. The original edition was subtitled "The Cycles of Time," and indeed, the five stories in the volume revolve around one another in a cyclical configuration. We begin with the fall of Tenochtitlán and end with a metahistorical Christopher Columbus signing contractual concessions to a Japanese corporation for T-shirts, fried chicken, pizzas, photographic cameras and stereos to be marketed as a result of

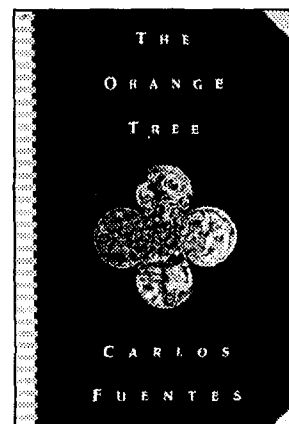
his so-called discovery of Paradise.

Echoes of numerous writers—from Harold Pinter to Nikos Kazantzakis—are heard at every turn. "Son of the Conquistador," a story about the heirs of Hernán Cortés—one the Creole child of a native American, the other a *gachupín* in the Iberian peninsula—evokes William Faulkner. "Apollo and the Whores," about a Hollywood actor looking for an adventurous death who ultimately meets his end in Acapulco, is written in diary form, recalling the art of Claude Simon and Gabriel García Márquez. The reverberance of literary voices is meant to represent Fuentes as a portable library, presenting a metaliterary dialogue à la Harold Bloom in which a confabulation of authors from the 20th century, dead and alive, talk to each other.

For all of Fuentes' talent, none of the stories in *The Orange Tree* leave a mark in the reader's memory. They are easily confused and forgotten. Fuentes injects in their chemistry something histrionic, depriving them of any trace of humbleness; they're reminiscent of his flashy public persona.

Fuentes' bright theatricality was apparent to me not long ago, when I was invited to attend a lecture he offered at the New School for Social Research, sponsored by the Mexican government. In front of an audience of some 750 students, scholars and diplomats, he engaged in linguistic pyrotechnics for about an hour and a half. The topic was Latin America. His English was impeccable and his charm a consummated artifice. He shouted when discussing the U.S. invasion of Panama and the Iran-contra affair. His sadness was apparent while commenting on the poverty and foreign debt in the southern cone. While the mechanics were infallible, the message was less attractive than the messenger: he was a walking encyclopedia capable of supplying an explanation to everything. Every other sentence he uttered, I couldn't help wondering where the writer was, a vulnerable entity with doubts and uncertainties. His stories suffer from the same overabundance of gesture and ingenuity.

Augusto Monterroso, a Guatemalan fabulist still awaiting a U.S. readership, once wrote a speculative text about writers dating their stories. He intelligently notes that essays, especially those dealing with current affairs, need a time of reference for the reader to know what was and wasn't



The Orange Tree
By Carlos Fuentes
Translated by Alfred Mac Adam
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
229 pp., \$21

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available during composition. But stories aiming for universality are allergic to such down-to-earth precision, which means that dating fiction, he concludes, is pointless. Fuentes illustrates Monterroso's point admirably. Every single text in *The Orange Tree*, written between winter 1991 and November 1992, is carefully placed in time and space: Acapulco-London, May 1991-September 1992; El Escorial, July 1992; London, November 11, 1992. He takes very seriously his role as cultural diplomat of the Hispanic world—a wandering ghost occasionally appearing at a symposium in his honor, a gala dinner to support Salman Rushdie, an interview with Bill Moyers, or as host of a television series. He's a total man, digesting every stimulus accessible, a ventriloquist stealing other people's voices. *The Orange Tree* fails as good literature because it's more interested in making a point than in offering an insight into human understanding. The stories are about humans but they lack human dignity.

Certainly Fuentes has to be applauded for his incredible stamina. He's no doubt a very intelligent writer whose

extraordinary aesthetic and political odyssey allows us to understand Latin America's modern search for identity. He manages to publish a book almost every year—and that probably explains the essentially unsatisfying quality of his later prose: to quote Yogi Berra, one cannot avoid a feeling of déjà vu all over again.

Most of his oeuvre is available to U.S. readers, and a few titles, including *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, have even been translated twice because of the inadequacy of the first attempt. Only marginal facets of his career remain obscure north of the border—his screenwriting, for instance (among his film projects, he collaborated in adapting Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*). And his essay collections, including one on Mexican politics in the late '60s and another on the new Latin American novel, remain largely untranslated. (Similarly, some non-fiction texts drafted in English, mainly the autobiographical ones, are unknown to Hispanic audiences.)

While as literary critic Fuentes oscillates between a fragile coherence and flashes of portentous intellect, he remains his own best interpreter. The first part of *Myself with Others*, his 1988 collection of essays that reads as a tribute to Philip Roth, is about his own pilgrimage as a writer and the shaping of his best work, *Aura*, a gothic 1962 novella. He explains how he began to write and rewrite, and how he wrote that tiny, memorable book.

The art of borrowing from others is clear in his celebration of Francisco de Quevedo, a Golden Age poet in Spain who he claims inspired him. "Yes, the true author of *Aura* is Quevedo, and I am pleased to represent him here today. This is the great advantage of time: the so-called author ceases to be such; he becomes an invisible agent for him who signed the book, published it and collected (and goes on collecting) the royalties. But the book was written—it always was, it always is—by others."

Still a bestseller in the Spanish-speaking world, *Aura* stands as an exercise in self-restraint, an attitude quite rare in Fuentes. Recalling the stories of Henry James, it is about a historian attempting to unravel the mystery surrounding a defunct revolutionary hero through his diaries and papers. The protagonist finds himself romantically involved with a woman simultaneously young and old, alive and dead. Past and future, the individual and the collective, become one in Fuentes' view of history and time. (The story is told in the future tense, through a second-person narrator.)

Of course, everywhere one looks today one finds books talking about books, writers metamorphosing into other writers. The problem with Fuentes is that he did his best metaliterary work decades ago. *Aura's* refreshing luminosity is far gone. He now appears lost in the labyrinth of his own verbosity.

I once saw an interview on U.S. television in which he claimed he had very little respect for critics, portraying himself as a cannibal who chewed on the bones of his critics and threw them away. Forty years after his first collection of stories, *Los días enmascarados*, was first published in Mexico, he still has his problems with the critics. Feminists often accuse him of misrepresenting Hispanic women. And the last time a book of his was reviewed in *The New Republic*, the Mexican historian Enrique Krauze, an Octavio Paz acolyte, described him as a charlatan. The review stirred a majestic controversy south of the Rio Grande, where Fuentes is considered a sacred cow among his intolerant supporters. In front-page articles, loyal columnists indicted Krauze as an unsympathetic Jew who dared to ridicule the author of *The Old Gringo* beyond national borders. Many even saw Krauze's action as a maneuver by Paz, once Fuentes' friend and now an acerbic enemy, to retain the attention needed to capture the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he received in 1990. Months of debate were followed by Fuentes' silence; not a single word was uttered by him.

It's no secret that, alongside Octavio Paz, Fuentes monopolizes contemporary Mexican letters. Once the

dynamic duo, they are virtually alone in controlling international attention, making many think that no other writers deserve recognition. Fuentes' books are immediately translated into numerous languages and sometimes appear in foreign languages before they do in Spanish. His friendships with world figures—from Jane Fonda and William Styron to Milan Kundera and the Kennedy family—attract curiosity and gossip.

Since he lives most of the time in London, critics accuse him of keeping a distance from his country's daily problems, showing up only in extreme circumstances. He travels around the globe writing books like *The Orange Tree*, in which Mexico and the whole New World become battlefields of allegorical truths. Paz, on the other hand, makes his home in the nation's capital. His current and early essays record Mexico's search for identity. But his own status has also been compromised: he is frequently pampered by Televisa, the privately run television network close to the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), and he is known for his closeness to Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and other leading establishment figures.

Both writers have lost credibility among an increasingly impatient young readership in Mexico, alien and detached. But foreigners know nothing about this disenchantment, preferring to see Fuentes as an ambassador from south of the border articulating unpleasant truths in a palatable fashion.

Literature is increasingly a multicultural hybrid: obscure national literatures have moved from the periphery of culture to center stage (making possible V.S. Naipaul, Nadine Gordimer and Anita Desai, among others); and the proliferation of translations and seminars worldwide have led to bizarre connections among writers, uniting Jorge Luis Borges with Danilo Kis and John Barth with the Brazilian modernist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis.

Fuentes may seem simultaneously the perfect hybrid and the ultimate blender: an envoy of the so-called Third World, he's made audiences in developed countries ashamed of their ignorance. He's attempted to become a kind of meta-author, a know-it-all, do-it-all creative machine. People north of the Rio Grande and across the Atlantic have believed him because they mistakenly think that articulate, multifaceted Latin Americans like him are an endangered species, an exception to the rule. Consequently, it has been next to impossible for them to read a Mexican writer interested in small realistic scenes and averse to archetypal images about repression and imperialism.

But while his early work, guided by a principle of self-restraint, was unforgettable, future readers will have to conclude that his overall contribution was tarnished by a Gargantuan appetite and a Hollywood persona.

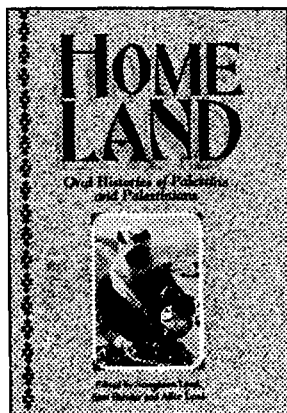
◀ **Ilan Stavans**, a Mexican novelist and critic, teaches at Amherst College. His latest books are *Tropical Synagogues: Short Stories by Jewish-Latin American Writers* (Holmes & Meier) and the forthcoming *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (HarperCollins), due out in August.

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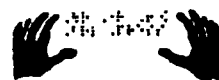
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should be, and will be," he wrote. "I want you to see a Postal Service where the customer comes first. I want you to see a smiling face at our retail counters."

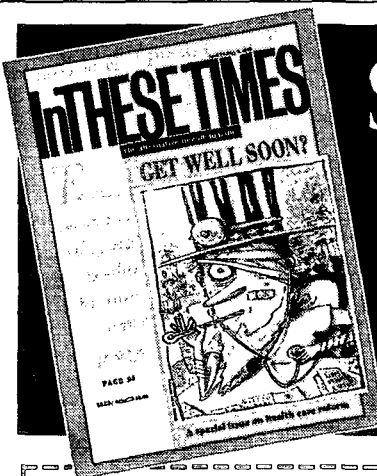
The Postal Service, Runyon explained, has brought in a team of experts ("some of our best and brightest") to fix the current mess. I'm a bit skeptical. In the wake of a scathing 1990 report on Chicago's Postal Service by the General Accounting Office, the Postmaster General at the time suggested a series of measures to improve service. They didn't work. As the *Chicago Tribune* concluded: "[I]f any of the plans were ever implemented, no one—not the customers and not the Postal Service employees—noticed."

But the problem goes beyond mere skepticism. Experts are hardly the solution to the problem of the Postal Service; experts have been part of the problem all along. In the early years of this century, labor consultant and self-proclaimed efficiency expert F.W. Taylor took aim at what he saw as an epidemic of laziness in our country's factories. Armed with their trusty stopwatches, Taylor and his disciples carefully monitored workers and strove to squeeze every bit of extra effort out of them they could. Taylor didn't just want to speed production up; he wanted to wrest from the hands of workers what control they had over their jobs, to reduce their work as much as possible to a mindless routine.

Postal work is some of the most "Taylorized" work in the nation. And it's getting even more pressurized. In a 1992 "restructuring," Chicago cut its postal workforce by some 1,500 employees, phased out through early retirement. It's hardly surprising, then, that surveys of postal employees in Chicago show "deep-seated anger and hostility," according to Joseph Kinney, executive director of the National Safe Workplace Institute. Workers denied a legitimate forum in which to present their grievances often resort to covert forms of resistance, Kinney suggests, taking out their anger in "acts of aggression and sabotage."

As far back as 1914, social critic Randolph Bourne pointed out that work without dignity not only tends to inspire among workers "a smoldering apathy" toward their jobs, but that it leads them to turn in "inefficient, undependable," even "utterly 'worthless'" performances. Bourne, unlike Taylor, saw this resistance as a sign of hope. "Distasteful ... as it must be to our sense of propriety," he wrote, "shirking may be the best hope that we have today ... that the zest of men and women for life, and that more abundantly, will incorrigibly reassert itself against overwhelming odds, and force recognition of the fact that life cannot be made permanently mechanical."

Of course, lighting a load of mail on fire is hardly the best solution to the problem; it merely transfers frustrations from workers to consumers. What we need is not sabotage, but stronger and more creative unions. Until then, workers will continue to grumble about their lousy jobs, and consumers will continue to grumble about lousy service. And those who are both workers and consumers—that being most of us—won't have much to be happy about. ▴



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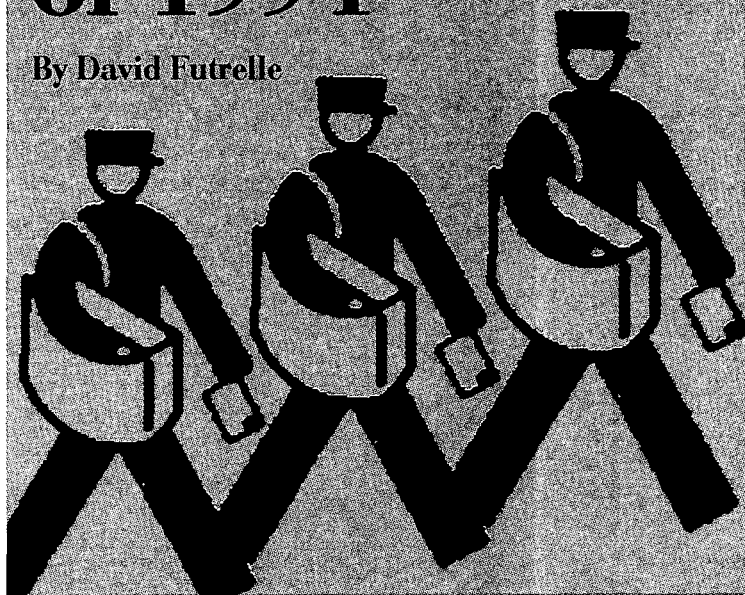
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The Great Postal War of 1994

By David Futrelle



IN THE END

idea how many pieces of my own mail have gone astray; I suspect quite a few, since on most days I receive a small stack of my neighbors' mail in addition to what I get of my own. (I generally redeliver it by hand; it's safer that way.) One day I got five letters: one for my downstairs neighbor, one for someone who had lived downstairs some months earlier, one for someone up the street, one for someone with a vaguely similar address in a different city—and one for me. Everyone I know has their own horror stories: an ITT colleague whose building gets no mail at all two or three days a week; an old roommate who discovered the post office had lost several weeks of his mail that he'd had held over the winter holidays; the friend who waited two weeks for a two-day "priority mail" package from Milwaukee.

There has been a lot of private grouching over the years. But a month or so ago, the dissatisfaction boiled over. A still-smoldering pile of mail was

Until recently, I never thought much about the mail. I have always been vaguely amazed by the very concept—that I can stick a small envelope with a few words scrawled on the outside in a box in one city and have it arrive at the home of a friend halfway across the country only days later. Nevertheless, like many of the wonders of the modern world I can't claim to understand—from microwave ovens to Ted Koppel's hair—I had come to take postal service for granted. That is, until I moved into my current apartment, in the Lakeview neighborhood on Chicago's North Side.

I live, you see, at what the *Chicago Tribune* calls "ground zero" in Chicago's Great Postal War. Perhaps you've heard of the problems with Chicago's mail. The city is widely recognized to have the worst postal service in the nation. A recent survey of 170 cities showed Chicago postal customers to be the unhappiest of the lot; only 64 percent were satisfied with their service.

You can count me as one of the dissatisfied. I have no

discovered under a viaduct, apparently lit by a postal employee who didn't feel like delivering the stuff. At the same time, a stash of some 20,000 old letters, some more than a decade old, was found in a delivery van.

In the midst of these revelations, Postmaster General Marvin Runyon arrived in town to reassure the city's residents that he still cared. Those he addressed didn't care that he cared; they wanted their mail. Like most Chicagoans, I took a certain vicarious pleasure in watching the good general fending off attacks from angry citizens.

Shortly afterward, in a half-page ad in the city's papers, Runyon promised to take care of what he delicately called "the postal issues that have frustrated Chicago for years." He promised quick results: "You'll see progress in weeks," he suggested—which is just about as quickly as we now get our mail. Runyon followed up the ad with a disconcertingly perky open letter to the city's residents. "We have some work to do to become my vision of what the Postal Service

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